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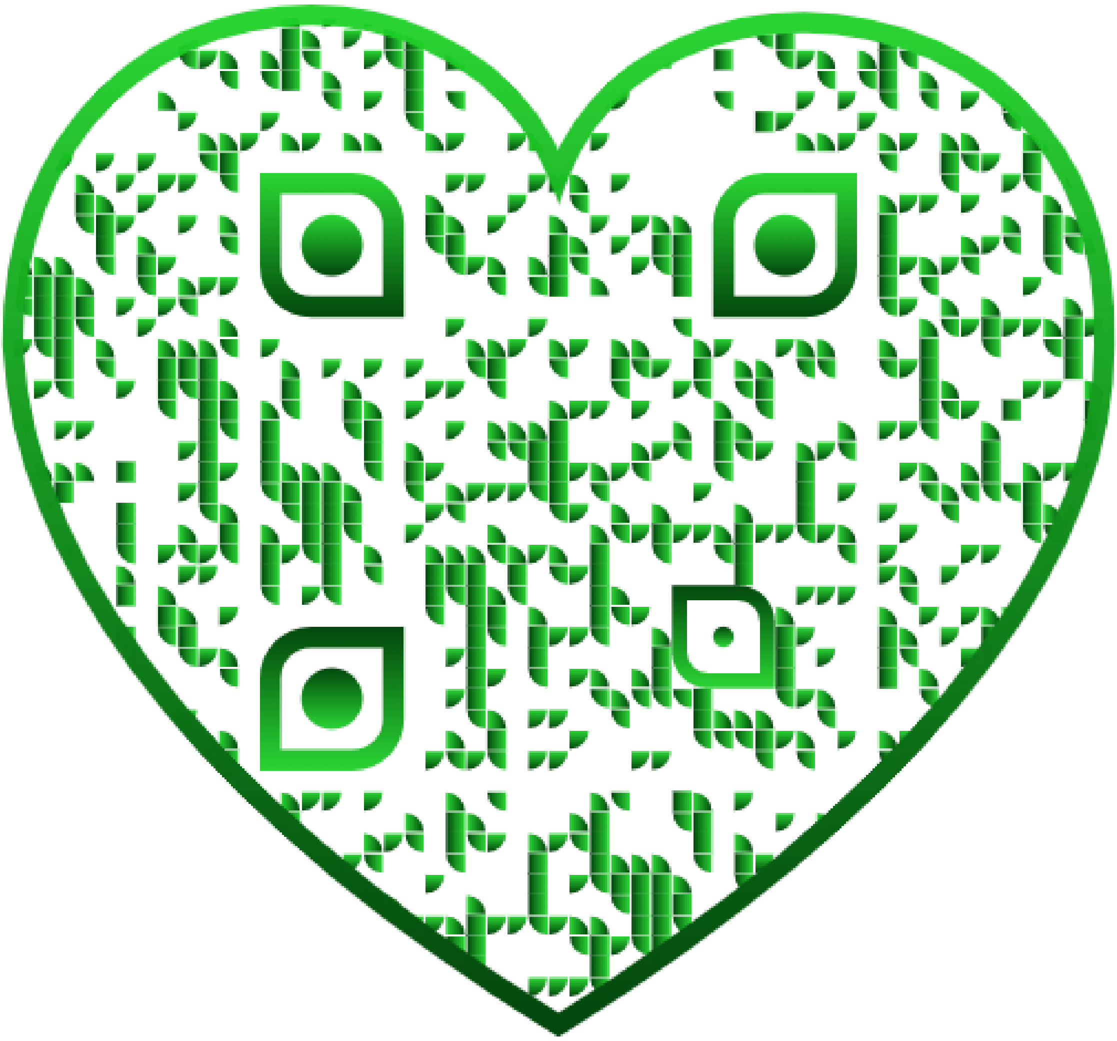
Angels ON EARTH

Won't You Be Our Valentine?



Angels® ON EARTH

Angels on Earth, a bimonthly magazine from Guideposts, presents true stories about heavenly angels and humans who have played angelic roles in daily life.

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down to earth

DEBORAH ORY

Happy anniversary to *Angels on Earth,* celebrating 30 years! The milestone got me thinking about the early days of my career, working as a copy editor at *Angels on Earth*'s parent magazine, *Guideposts.* Fact-checking was a big part of my job, which was perfect for a scrupulous person like me.

There was plenty to check in *Guideposts'* true-life stories of hope and inspiration. Scenes came alive on the page, putting readers in the storyteller's shoes at a specific time, in a specific place. Facts big and small, local or national—a street name in downtown Nashville, the date of some little-known community event, the likelihood of rain during the Texas State Fair or the year the Saints won the Super Bowl—all had to be checked and double-checked. I spent a lot of time talking to people, getting to the bottom of fuzzy memories. It was satisfying to help folks put all the pieces together so they could tell their stories in a clear and factual way.

In 1995, I took a true leap of faith: I signed on to *Guideposts'* new publication, *Angels on Earth.* I fell in love with the stories and the people telling them. But my copy editor brain was baffled: How to fact-check an angel? First, I exhausted the list of checkable facts. Then, in long talks with the patient narrators of our most mysterious stories, I slowly got used to trusting the rest to be true. It was an exercise in faith on my part.

After a time, experience showed me that there was one fact I could always rely on: Whether it was in a big way or in some small way, angels changed people's lives. Always. That came across without fail, the ultimate fact-check.

So, if an angelic experience changed you or someone you love, tell us about it at **submissions@angelsonearth.org**. I'd be thrilled to celebrate your story in 2025.

Colleen Hughes

COLLEEN HUGHES, SENIOR LEAD EDITOR

ILLUSTRATION BY STEFANO VITALE

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TOP: COURTESY MICHAEL GATTO

COVER ILLUSTRATION BY DONNA GRETHEN

BUICK
CHEVROLET
GM
DODGE

OUR Long & Joyful RIDE

Their love story features the iconic 1955 Chevrolet Bel Air

BY JUDY SARNS, LIVONIA, MICHIGAN

After flying all night from Detroit, I could barely keep my eyes open while we rode the bus from the Amsterdam airport to the passenger terminal, where my friends and I would board the ship for a river cruise adventure. What day was it even? With the difference in time zones, I was completely turned around.

I peered out the bus window, my friend Margot in the aisle seat next to me. *Why did I even agree to this trip?* I wondered. My friends had thought the change of scenery would do me good. It had been two years since the death of my beloved husband, Russ, and I'd stayed close to home, close to memories of him. If nothing else, the highway full of compact European cars zooming around our bus proved that I was far from anything familiar. Far away from all the daily reminders of a nearly 50-year marriage. It just made me miss Russ more. If only I could feel him looking down on me with that smile that had caught my attention when I first laid eyes on him in Sunday school class. I was 10 years old. Next to our names in the attendance book were our birthdates.

"Look," Russ said. "You were born a day before me." He wanted me

ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL CRAMPTON

to find out what time. The next week, I reported back, and we discovered that I was older by 15 hours. I lorded it over him, and that was the beginning of our friendship.

Four years later, in 1956, he asked me to the eighth-grade graduation dance at his school. Russ's father pulled into our driveway, Russ in the passenger seat. They were in the family's new 1955 coral and gray Chevrolet Bel Air, with whitewall tires under its big, muscular body. I got goose bumps climbing in beside Russ. We lived in Detroit, the auto capital of the world. Ever since I was a young girl, I'd known nearly every make and model of car on sight. I enjoyed the dance as much as the ride in the Bel Air.

One summer day, Russ rode his bicycle the two miles to my house after his family returned from vacation. "I brought you back something," he said. He handed me a letter opener with a delicate blond wood handle.

I had kept that first gift all these years. If I were at home instead of staring out of a bus window in Amsterdam, I would have reached for it just to hold it in my hands while I reminisced about those early days when we were kids.

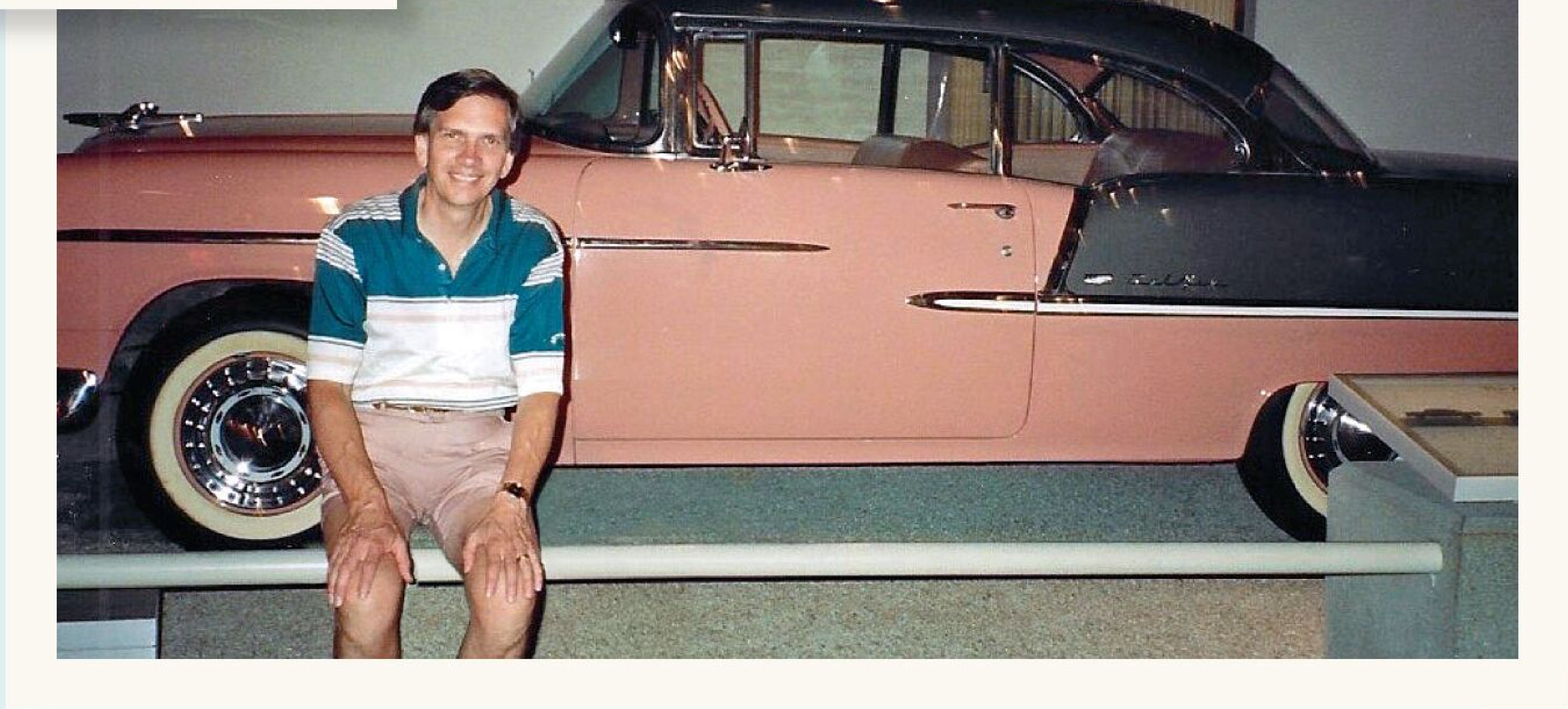
On September 1, 1959—I knew even then that I'd never want to forget that Tuesday—Russ asked me out to a movie and a hamburger at a drive-in restaurant. We were 17. This time, when that coral-and-gray Bel Air pulled up, Russ was behind the wheel. My heart beat a mile a minute. Our first real date! Russ was a cautious driver. I could tell that he took the responsibility of borrowing the family car seriously. With its comfortable front seat and spacious interior, I felt safe and secure, just as I did with Russ.

"I love the colors on this model," I told Russ while we ate our burgers.

"My parents were looking at the cream and light blue," Russ said, "but I talked them into getting this one instead. The '55 is the only model that comes in coral and gray, so it's more special."

The fact that Russ had picked it out made me love the Bel Air even more. It was the car he picked me up in while we dated all through college. When we got married in 1964, Russ's parents gave us the Bel Air as a wedding present.

We drove the car we fell in love in for the next eight years, until rust and mechanical issues finally took a toll. We thanked the Bel Air for all the joy it had given us and traded it in for a Chevy not nearly as special. Occasionally we'd go to a car show and



Through the years: Judy and Russ with his parents' Bel Air in 1956 and 1962 (above), and Russ with a museum model in 2003 (right)

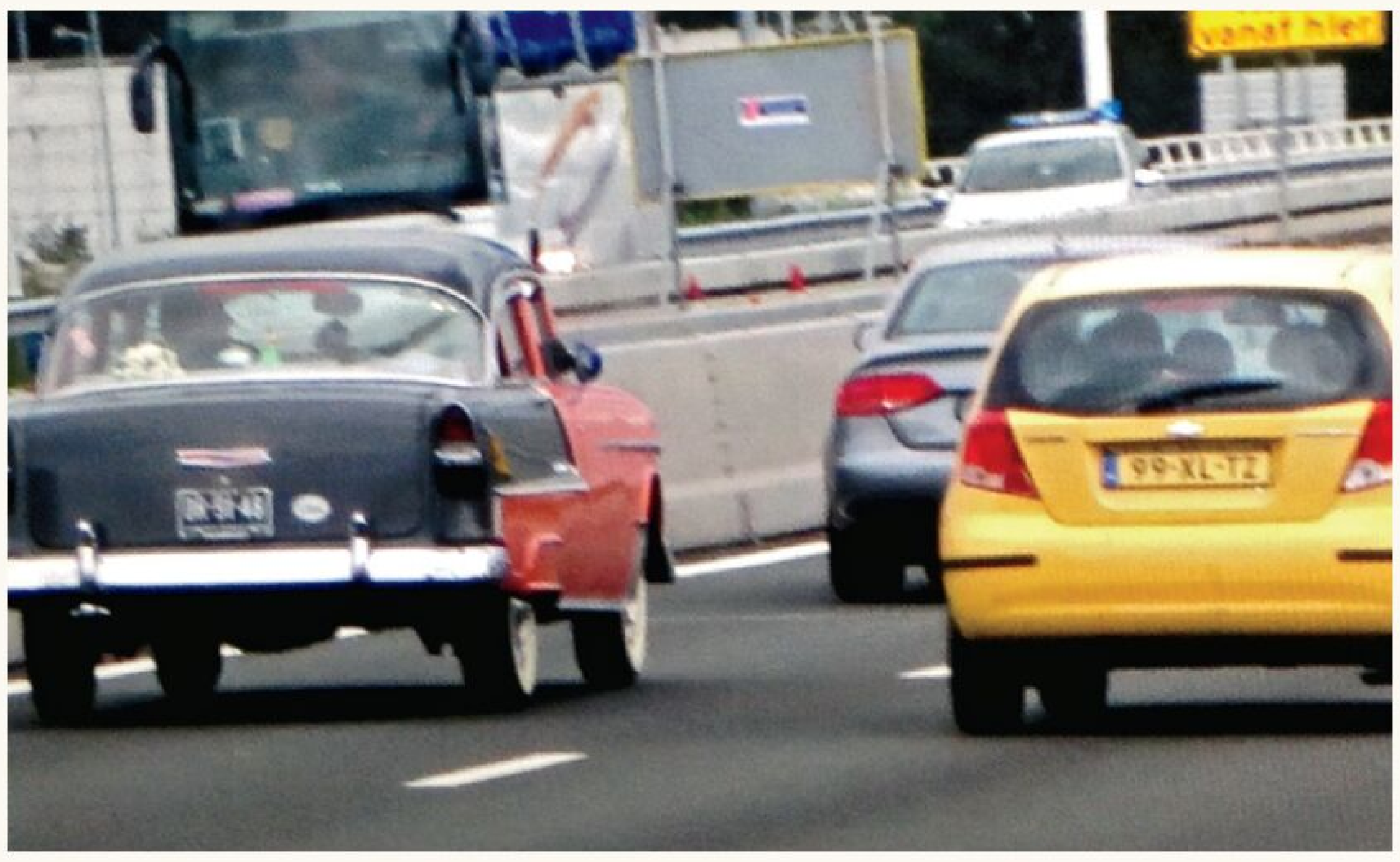
see a 1955 coral-and-gray Bel Air in pristine condition, just like ours was when Russ picked me up in it for our first date.

"Wouldn't it be fun to own one again?" Russ always said. He surprised me when he actually handed over his business card to the owner of a model on display.

"If you're ever interested in selling, give me a call," Russ said. Not that there was any chance of that happening with such a rare jewel. But a year later, the phone rang.

"Are you still interested in the Bel Air?" the man on the other end said.

Truth be told, this second coral-and-gray Bel Air gave us more joy than the first one had. We took it out only for fun, the perfect car for an ice cream cone run. We entered it in car shows and won first place a few times. In 2008, to celebrate its 100th birthday, General Motors selected one car from each year for a parade down the auto industry's famous Woodward Avenue. Russ wrote an essay about how he had urged his parents to buy the coral-and-gray 1955 Bel Air and how much the car had meant to us. Our car was chosen for the parade! It felt as if we were part of history.



Judy's favorite snapshot from her trip

Just a year later we heard that Rob Reiner was filming a movie called *Flipped,* set in the 1950s, a love story that begins in middle school. A call went out for period cars, and we applied with ours. Rob Reiner himself came to see the Bel Air, and I couldn't resist telling him our love story.

"That sounds like my movie!" he said. "And your car is perfect for it too."

We spent days on the movie set, and Russ drove the Bel Air while the cameras rolled. When the movie came out, Russ and I took friends to see it eight times. To us, each viewing felt like a Hollywood premiere. We knew every scene with our car in it by heart. I'd sold the Bel Air after Russ died, but I could see it perfectly in my mind's eye.

Margot leaned around me toward the bus window. "Isn't it beautiful?" she said.

"What?" For a second I thought she was talking about the Bel Air I'd sold. My friend gestured grandly to the view beyond the motorway.

I tried to live in the moment instead of losing myself in the past. But all I had of Russ were my recollections. It was comforting to think he might be looking down on me from heaven, but here in Amsterdam, thousands of miles from home, he felt further away than ever.

I peered out at the traffic buzzing past. A flicker of orange caught my eye. No, coral. And gray. The biggest car on the road. Suddenly I was completely alert. Driving right past our bus was a coral-and-gray 1955 Chevrolet Bel Air! I grabbed my phone and snapped a photo before the car zoomed away. *Oh, Russ!* I thought.

"Look at this, Margot. You won't believe it." She knew our story well. All my friends did.

"You do know that today is September 1?"

"Oh, my goodness," I said, lost in amazement. "The anniversary of our first real date!"

My heart swelled with joy. There was no way any of this was coincidence. I felt recharged. I knew I would enjoy my friends and this trip. God kept Russ near to me whether I was at home in Michigan or cruising the rivers of Europe. That, I could be sure of.

I tapped the photo on my phone to zoom in. I couldn't see inside the Chevy Bel Air, but there was no doubt in my mind that an angel was behind the wheel. ■

lost & found

I pulled into the parking lot of the Bouncing Barn, an indoor play area with bounce houses. My five-year-old son, Nathan, jumped out of the car and right into a snow drift. He certainly put his favorite Spider-Man snow boots to good use.

Inside, Nathan ran off in his sock feet. He spent the next two hours running around, laughing and jumping with a boy who looked to be about the same age, if size was any indication. I gave Nathan a five-minute warning when it was time to go. “Grab your boots,” I called to him.

In the car, I noticed something odd. Nathan was wearing one Spider-Man and one Batman snow boot. “My new friend had Batman, so we traded. Now we both have Spider-Man *and* Batman!” he said. The problem was, Nathan was wearing two left boots. We went back inside, but we couldn’t find the boy or the two mismatched boots for the right foot. Nathan cried when I told him he had to take the snow boots off for good.

A week later, I got a text message from an unknown number. “Hey,” I read, “strange question: Did your son trade boots at the Bouncing Barn last week? If so, can we switch back?” A mutual friend had heard the boot swap story from both of us and knew it couldn’t be a coincidence. We met up, and the boys were so excited to see each other that we went out to lunch. Spider-Man, Batman and their moms all had a great time and went home with matching pairs of shoes.

DIANE STARK, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

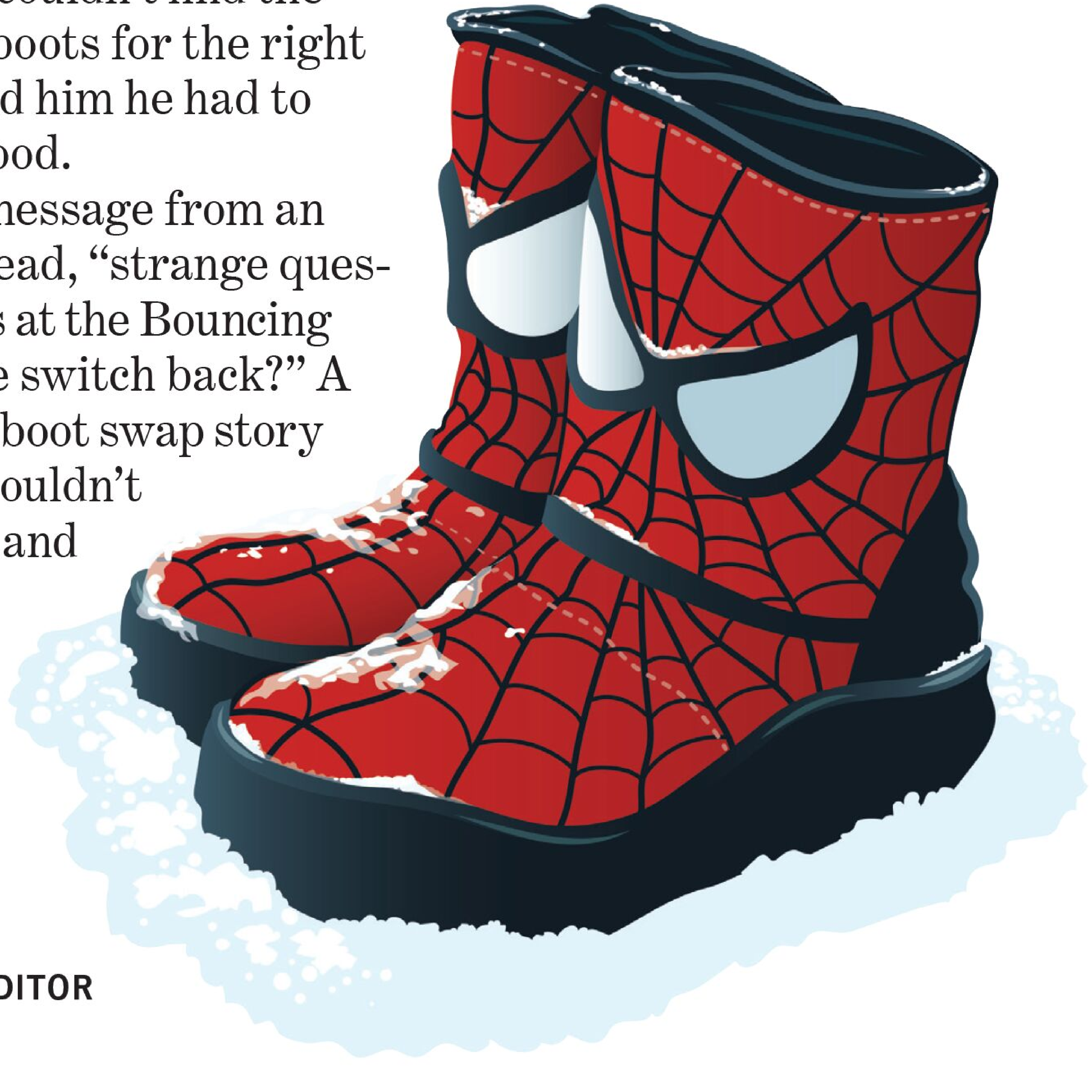


ILLUSTRATION BY CHRIS LYON

A Forest of My Own

My sister promised that one day I would have more than a tree to cheer me

BY MARY WHITNEY, LEAVITTSBURG, OHIO

Santa wouldn't be delivering his Christmas magic to our house the year I was 10. Life as we knew it had come to a halt when my father died unexpectedly a month before the holidays. My oldest brother, Wayne, was sending home his paycheck from the Navy, while my mother looked for a job to support the four of us children who were still living at home. Everything had changed for our family in the blink of an eye.

The one familiar thing we did have that season was a Christmas tree, a gift from a neighbor. One night, my younger brother, Glenn, and I lay on the floor, gazing up at the swirl of branches. Our older sister, Gale, sat on the floor beside us to tell a story before bedtime. I scooted my head right up to the tree trunk so all I could see was the swirl of green boughs above.

"Christmas was coming," Gale began, "and all the trees were white with snow." *What a glorious picture,* I thought, breathing in a fresh pine scent. Listening to our bedtime story, I imagined myself wandering through a snowy forest. A magical Christmas forest of my very own, where thick white boughs reached out to me like angels' arms.

Glenn yawned. By the end of the story, my eyelids were heavy too. I climbed into bed, and the last thing

ILLUSTRATION BY ELEANOR GROSCH

18+

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the biggest Internet portal, providing you various content: brand new books, trending movies, fresh magazines, hot games, recent software, latest music releases.

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I remembered before dropping off to sleep was my big sister covering me with a quilt.

"I promise you," Gale whispered. "One day you will have more than a Christmas tree to cheer you."

Mom found a job as children's director at a church in another town. We rented a small house nearby and settled in. Gale followed Wayne into the service. My middle brother, David, signed up too when he graduated high school. By the time I was 14, it was just Glenn, Mom and me left at home. I was glad to see Mom enjoying her job and a new friendship with the church secretary, Ann.

Late one winter afternoon, I walked into the kitchen just as Mom was taking something wonderful out of the oven. One of her famous casseroles. But instead of setting the table for an early dinner, Mom wrapped up the meal in tinfoil.

"Ann hasn't been able to come to work lately. She's not feeling well at all," Mom said. "I'm sure she and her husband, Tom, would appreciate us dropping off some comfort food, since the ranch they live on is a bit out of the way."

Glenn and I climbed into the back seat of the car with the warm casserole between us. We held on to Ann and Tom's dinner to make sure it didn't slide off the seat on the drive. Mom slowed when we approached a winding road. She couldn't tell us exactly what to expect as we got closer to the house. She'd never been to their ranch either.

"Horses!" I said, as we came around a curve. I counted five of them grazing in a field. Around the next bend, Glenn pointed to a small herd of cattle. Up ahead of the cows, I saw what looked like acres of pine

Mary dreamed of a winter wonderland—and God delivered.

trees. I sat up in my seat. "Do your friends live in a forest?"

"I suppose you could say so," my mother said. "I'd forgotten all about their Christmas tree farm."

A whole forest of Christmas trees, I thought, *where the boughs reached out to comfort whoever wandered through it.* I remembered the peaceful wintry forest my mind had taken me to during the hardest Christmas our family had known.

Mom pulled in the driveway at the ranch house, and we went to the door. Ann answered, but she looked terribly weak. She couldn't stop thanking us for the hot meal. Her husband stood by, quiet, but I could see he was just as grateful. We quickly said our goodbyes to the couple and let Ann get back to resting.

All the way home, I imagined wandering through the rows of pine trees, the boughs sweeping my shoulders while I welcomed people in search of just the right one.

"Wouldn't it be wonderful to live there?" I asked Glenn. "Every day would be like Christmas. A very good Christmas." Glenn agreed with me wholeheartedly.

I hoped we'd get to see the couple again, when Ann was feeling better, but her illness turned out to be much more serious than we knew. Lung cancer took her from Tom not long after our visit. Mom delivered many single servings of casserole and other comfort food to Tom over the next year. She knew how devastating it was to lose a beloved spouse.

I thought of the Christmas tree farm often, especially during the holidays. It made me sad to think of Tom watching over it all alone.

Then one summer day, Tom appeared on our doorstep, hat in hand. He wanted to talk to Glenn and me, both of us teenagers now. "I've come to ask," he said shyly, "if you would mind me courting your mother."

We gave Tom our blessing. Our siblings approved too. "One day you'll have more than a tree to cheer you," my sister had predicted. God had so much more in store. After Mom and Tom got married, I could wander a forest of evergreens all year long. During the holidays, I helped families choose the perfect tree to take home, but my favorite was always the one my own new family had chosen.

Even with a whole forest at my doorstep, I would never forget how important a single tree could be. That gift from our neighbors when I was 10 held a promise. On our saddest holiday, a tree promised that God would one day put magic in my Christmas again. ■

ILLUSTRATION BY TRACY WALKER

I worried about
my husband
being able to
favor his good ear
for long periods

No Complaints

BY VIDA BRINSON, FREEPORT, FLORIDA

Complaining wasn't in my husband Aaron's nature, so sometimes it took a while for him to speak up and ask for the help he needed. For the past few days, I'd had a hunch that he was in pain but didn't want to say so. "Your ear's still hurting, isn't it?" I finally asked him one morning. "The same one? The left ear?" He'd already taken a course of antibiotics prescribed by his doctor.

Aaron nodded. "It's starting to interfere with my work."

Aaron was an electrical engineer at the Department of Defense. He managed other engineers, collaborating to build complicated equipment. Focus was key during big roundtable meetings, but especially during long conversations over the phone. Aaron didn't like to ask for special accommodations at work any more than he liked asking me for help at home, so I knew the situation must be serious. We made an appointment with an ear, nose and throat specialist.

It was a good thing we did. A scan revealed a cyst in Aaron's left ear. The specialist recommended surgery to remove the cyst as soon as possible, preferably at an otology clinic about 400 miles away in Nashville. The cyst was likely causing damage to all or some of the bones in the ear's middle chamber—the hammer, the anvil, the stirrup.

In Nashville, the surgeon explained that he would use artificial bones to replace the damaged ones, so that Aaron wouldn't lose hearing in his left ear. All of this was to happen in a single surgery, and Aaron was rolled away into the operating room early one morning.

That afternoon, the surgeon came by the recovery room. He walked over to Aaron's right side and spoke clearly. "The good news is," he said, "I was able to remove the cyst." But the scan had not told the whole story. The surgeon had to repair unexpected damage to the skull. I winced at the idea, but Aaron simply nodded.

"Unfortunately, I couldn't reconstruct everything today as we had planned," the doctor continued. "The stirrup bone was intact, but I need to replace the hammer and anvil bones. First, we'll have to wait for your ear to heal from this operation. Until then, you won't be able to hear out of your left ear."

"For how long?" Aaron asked.

"A full year," the doctor said. A long time, but I knew Aaron wouldn't complain for a minute of it. We scheduled the second surgery.

After a week back home recovering, Aaron was physically ready to return to work. Pain wouldn't be an issue, but I worried about him being able to favor his good ear for long periods. On his first day back, I was specific during my prayer time. *God, help Aaron get through the year.*

My husband wasn't asking God for something small. He was asking for a miracle.

I welcomed him at the door that evening with an encouraging hug. "One day down," I said. "I'm praying the year will fly by."

"Oh, I've been asking God to let me hear long before that," Aaron said.

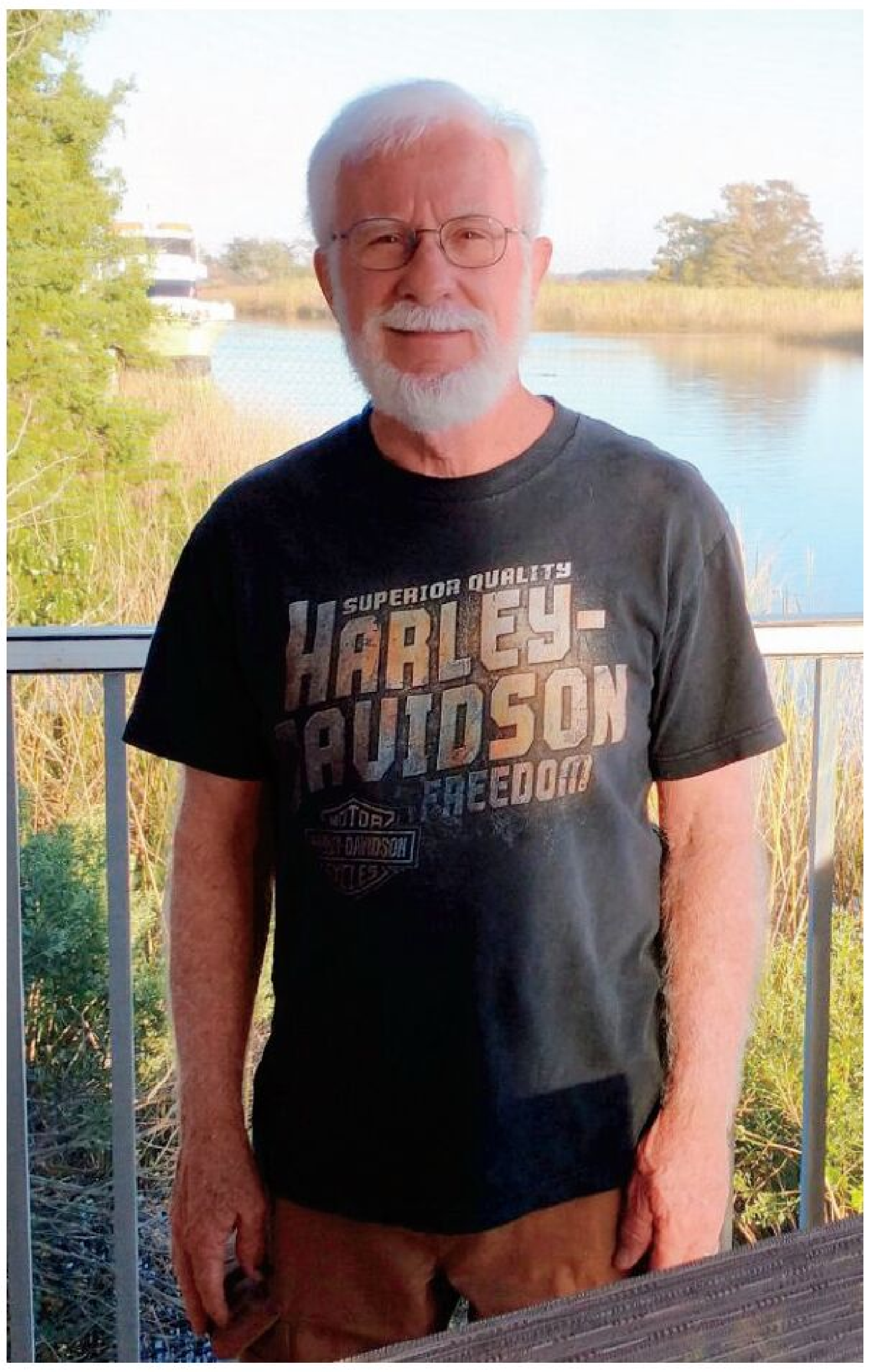
My husband had actually asked for something? A man who never asked anybody for anything? And he wasn't just asking for something small, either. He was asking God for a miracle. I was shocked. I continued with my own reasonable prayer. I knew Aaron would adjust without complaint. He didn't need a miracle.

At dinner one night, he laughed off one challenge he found particularly silly. "It's been three weeks, and I can't seem to break the habit of resting the phone on my left shoulder so I can freely take notes with my right hand. I keep having to ask people to repeat themselves after I switch the phone to my good ear."

"God will help," I said. "Just give him time."

"Don't you worry," he said. "I'm still praying for my miracle." I adjusted my usual prayer to include Aaron not being too disappointed for the next 11 months. I hoped God heard me.

A few days into my new prayer, Aaron came home looking stunned. "I got a call at work today," he said. "I tucked the phone under my left ear, picked up my pen with my right hand. Started taking notes. Suddenly I realized…I could hear! Not 100 percent, but well enough that I didn't have to switch to my good ear."



When Aaron's hearing wasn't 100 percent, God's was.

"Sweetheart, how can that be? Should we call the surgeon?"

"Why? To tell him God answered my prayer?" Aaron said. "Probably not."

Aaron and I returned to Nashville for his second surgery as scheduled. "Ready to get your hearing back?" the surgeon asked at the pre-op meeting.

"I've been able to hear pretty good for months now," Aaron said.

The surgeon shook his head. "If that's so, it's a mystery if I ever heard one," he said. I couldn't blame him for being skeptical. Aaron asking God for a miracle was almost as surprising as God giving him one!

After the operation, we got only good news. Aaron's hearing in his left ear was 100 percent. "By the way," the surgeon said, "I noticed that your eardrum had moved out of place. It was making contact with your stirrup bone, allowing you to hear at least partially. So, mystery solved."

My husband didn't ask for a lot, but when he did, he went all the way. He trusted that his prayers were heard 100 percent, and he was right. There was no mystery to it. ■

Heavenly

Cold noses and warm paws await

I am now at the age when I think a lot about how God will welcome me into heaven. What must it feel like to arrive at those pearly gates? What will I see when I step inside? I imagine that the heavenly homecoming might be tailored for each newcomer. If so, I know exactly what I hope to see first. I would like to be greeted right away by all the dogs I have ever loved. There will be plenty of time to enjoy relatives and friends later.

This can raise eyebrows until I explain. Dogs have been an important part of my life ever since I was a child. But there is more to it than that. As I reviewed happy memories of the four-legged companions of my adult years, a pattern of utter devotion emerged.

Take the time I was recovering at home after surgery. Family and friends faithfully checked in to keep me company, to make sure I was comfortable and to monitor my progress. In between visits, my thoughtful caregivers could rest easy. Before saying goodbye, they would arrange my medication, a glass of water, the TV remote and my phone within easy reach. Any number of people were on call should I need their help, but there was one caregiver who never left my side.

My canine companion had the reassuring habit of sticking his cold nose on my arm or face in the middle of the night, just to let me know he was right there for me,

Best Friends

BY CHARLES E. FLOWERS, COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA

doing everything a dog could do, without fail. He walked with me to the bathroom and alongside me when I went back to bed. Anytime I felt like talking, he listened. If I changed the channel in the middle of a TV show, he didn't complain. Once, I almost asked him to fetch me a snack from the kitchen!

In my younger days, another beloved canine companion napped intermittently while I worked on many weekend projects in the garage. If it was necessary for me to dig in the yard for one reason or another, she was more than happy to assist. Joyful, even. When I took a break, she sat at my feet for a belly rub or a pat on the head.

For many years, our house was full. If I arrived home very late from a business trip or meeting, I opened the door quietly so as not to wake anyone sleeping inside. But guess who would be standing there in the entryway, wagging her tail, waiting to welcome me home.

I can't wait to say hello again to the whole pack when I arrive at those pearly gates. What a reunion it will be. ■

GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Science now endorses the old adage, finding benefits to the pet relationship on both sides.

earning their wings

Whether she's on the road or in her driveway, Krista's got angels looking out for her.

To the Rescue

KRISTA HARRINGTON, HEBRON, KENTUCKY

Driving conditions weren't the best that evening, and I drove slowly on the snowy road. When I reached my cul-de-sac, I breathed a sigh of relief. *Almost home.* Then my house came into view. I was home but not home free. Not with the slushy mound the snowplow had left in front of our driveway. I knew my little car would have a hard time barreling over it, but I tried anyway and promptly got stuck. My husband wasn't yet home from work, and it was freezing out. Now what?

Just then, a neighbor I'd seen but never spoken to sprinted over to my car. "We'll have to rock it free," he said through the crack in my window. I followed his instructions as he worked his magic.

"We did it!" I said. My neighbor gave a friendly wave as he headed back home and out of the cold. It was high time for a formal introduction and a plate of warm cookies.

On the Daily

BROOKE JONES
RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS FOUNDATION
DENVER, COLORADO

In the 1990s, a Bay Area reporter wrote that the media should stop reporting about acts of violence and start focusing on random acts of kindness. Those words started a movement, and the Random Acts of Kindness Foundation was born. It was later purchased by a private foundation and relocated to Colorado. The Foundation is a small nonprofit with one goal: to make kindness the norm. We believe that kindness can be taught, and that acts of kindness build connections between people. We want to inspire and encourage individuals to perform acts of kindness in their schools, their workplaces and in their own homes, because we know that their efforts will create a ripple effect in their communities. Our website offers many unique kindness suggestions to get people started.

The Foundation celebrates Random Acts of Kindness Day each year on February 17, but every day is a great day to do something kind. For more information, visit **randomactsofkindness.org**.

Celebrate someone you love♥

RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS
FOUNDATION
www.randomactsofkindness.org

What could be more natural than kindness?

Gift Shop Gift

JENNY EDWARDS, EVERGREEN, COLORADO

I walked into a gift shop on Valentine's Day with a lump in my throat. My husband had passed away just weeks before, and I missed him so much. Today he would have had a dozen red roses for me, like always. I walked around the store, admiring the displays and scanning the beautiful greeting cards, trying to distract myself from my grief.

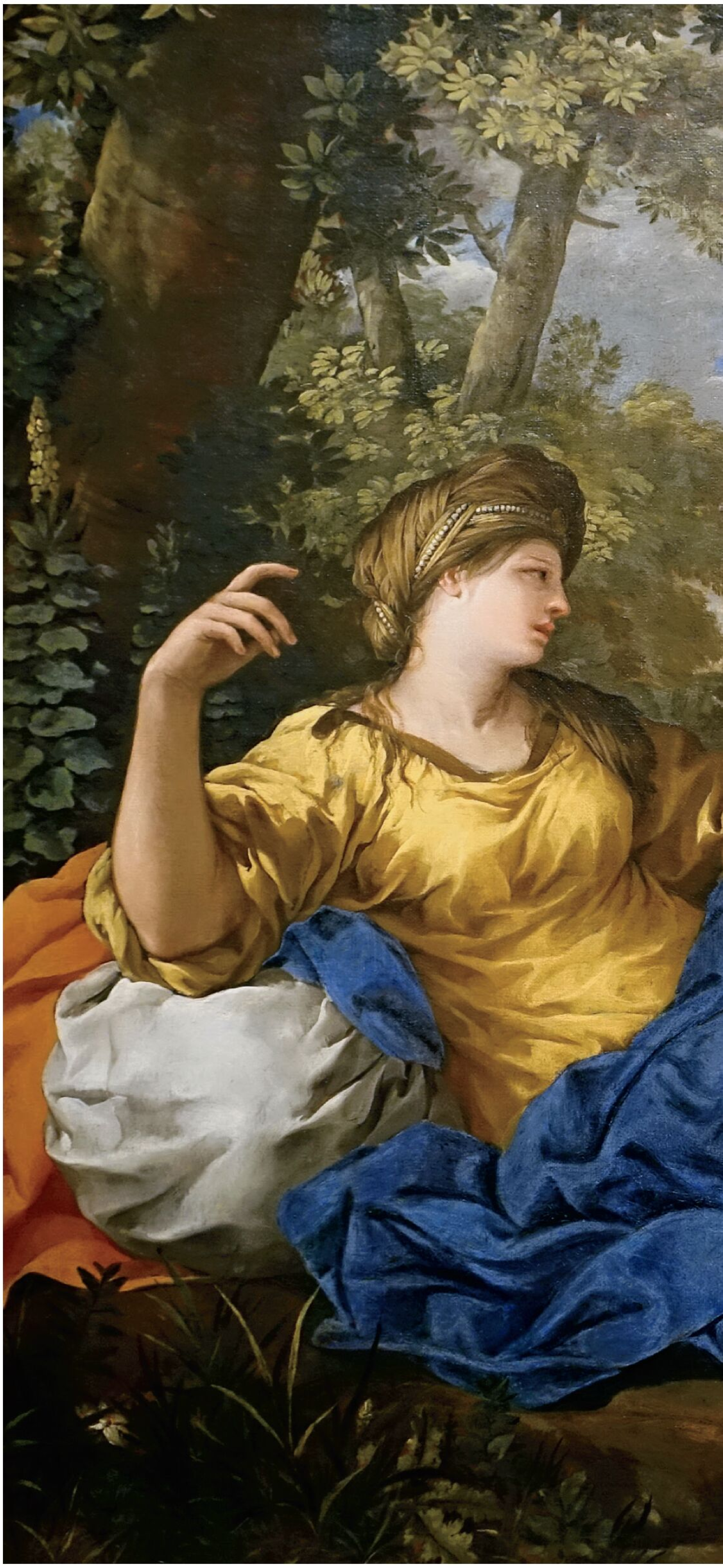
A rose for Jenny

On my way out, a red journal caught my eye. *Red like a rose,* I thought. I brought the journal to the cashier and told her I would use it to record wonderful memories of my husband. "Give me a minute," she said and went to the back of the store. When she returned with a long-stemmed red rose just for me, she was surprised to hear how perfect her thoughtful gift was.

EYEWITNESS TO AN *Angel*

You'll find the first one in the Book of Genesis

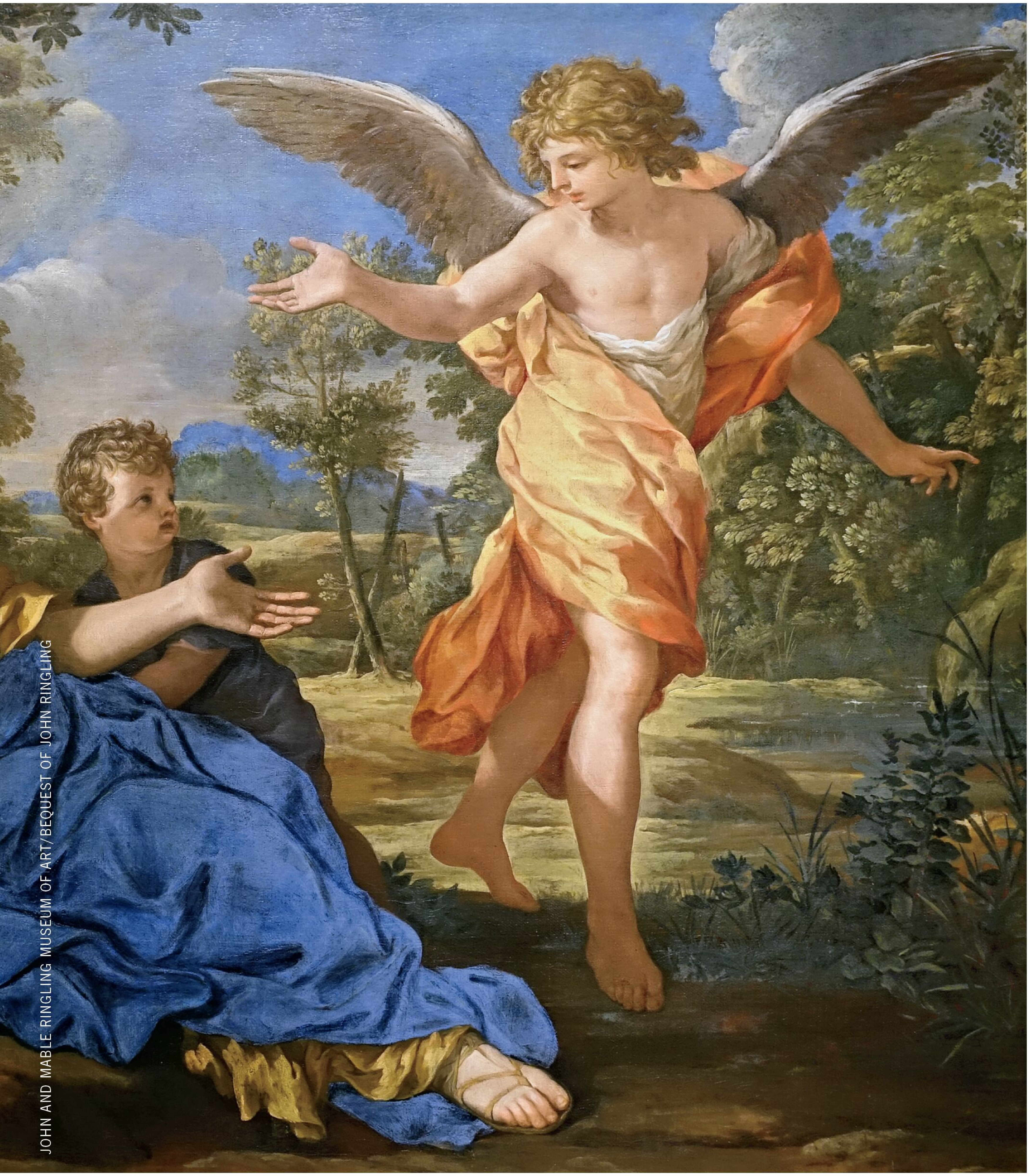
BY RICK HAMLIN, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR



Who receives the first angelic visit in the Bible? It's not at all whom I expected. Not a prophet, not a patriarch, but a young woman in a distinctly subservient role. The first angel recorded in the Bible appeared to Hagar, an Egyptian slave girl, servant to Abraham and Sarah.

Abraham had been told by God that he'd have more descendants than the stars he could count in heaven. It certainly seemed unlikely. He was well into his eighties at that point, as was his wife, Sarah. They had had no children in their younger years.

Sarah laughs when she hears that message. Impossible! But she has an idea of her own. Why doesn't Abraham have a child by her servant, Hagar? The child would assure that Abraham would have descendants. We don't know what Abraham thought



JOHN AND MABLE RINGLING MUSEUM OF ART/BEQUEST OF JOHN RINGLING

of the arrangement, but he was a dutiful husband. As Sarah had intended, Hagar conceives.

Almost immediately and to Abraham's surprise, Sarah becomes besieged with jealousy. She takes her anger out on the pregnant and faithful Hagar, treating her harshly.

FOR A TIME, ALL SEEMS RIGHT WITH THIS RATHER UNUSUAL FAMILY.

When Hagar can't take Sarah's abuse any longer, she runs away, feeling lost and betrayed.

Enter the Bible's first angel. Seeking out Hagar, he finds her grieving by a spring of water in the wilderness. He asks where she has come from—even though we know the angel knows the answer.

"I'm running away from my mistress, Sarah."

"Return to your mistress and submit to her," the angel says to Hagar, adding a promise, not unlike the one Abraham received: "I will so greatly multiply your offspring that they cannot be counted...."

And then we get our first glimpse of an annunciation. The angel tells Hagar she will bear a son, who shall be called Ishmael, which means *God hears*—"for the Lord has given heed to your affliction." Hagar returns to the house of her mistress and gives birth. She names the child Ishmael as was ordained.

Abraham and his wife are even older when Sarah herself conceives and bears a son, Isaac. For a time, all seems right with this rather unusual family, Ishmael playing with his half-brother, Isaac. Harmony wasn't to last. Sarah's jealousy rises to the surface once again. She demands that Abraham banish Hagar along with 12-year-old Ishmael.

Abraham loves both his sons. With a heavy heart, he gives Hagar some bread and a skin of water and sends her and young Ishmael away. They wander about in the wilderness, supplies quickly becoming scarce in the oppressive heat. Hagar fears her son will die from starvation. She lifts her voice up to heaven and weeps.

The angel returns to her. "Do not be afraid," he says. He instructs Hagar to hold the boy fast. She closes her eyes and listens to the angel's promise: A great nation will come of Ishmael, in keeping with God's promise to Abraham.

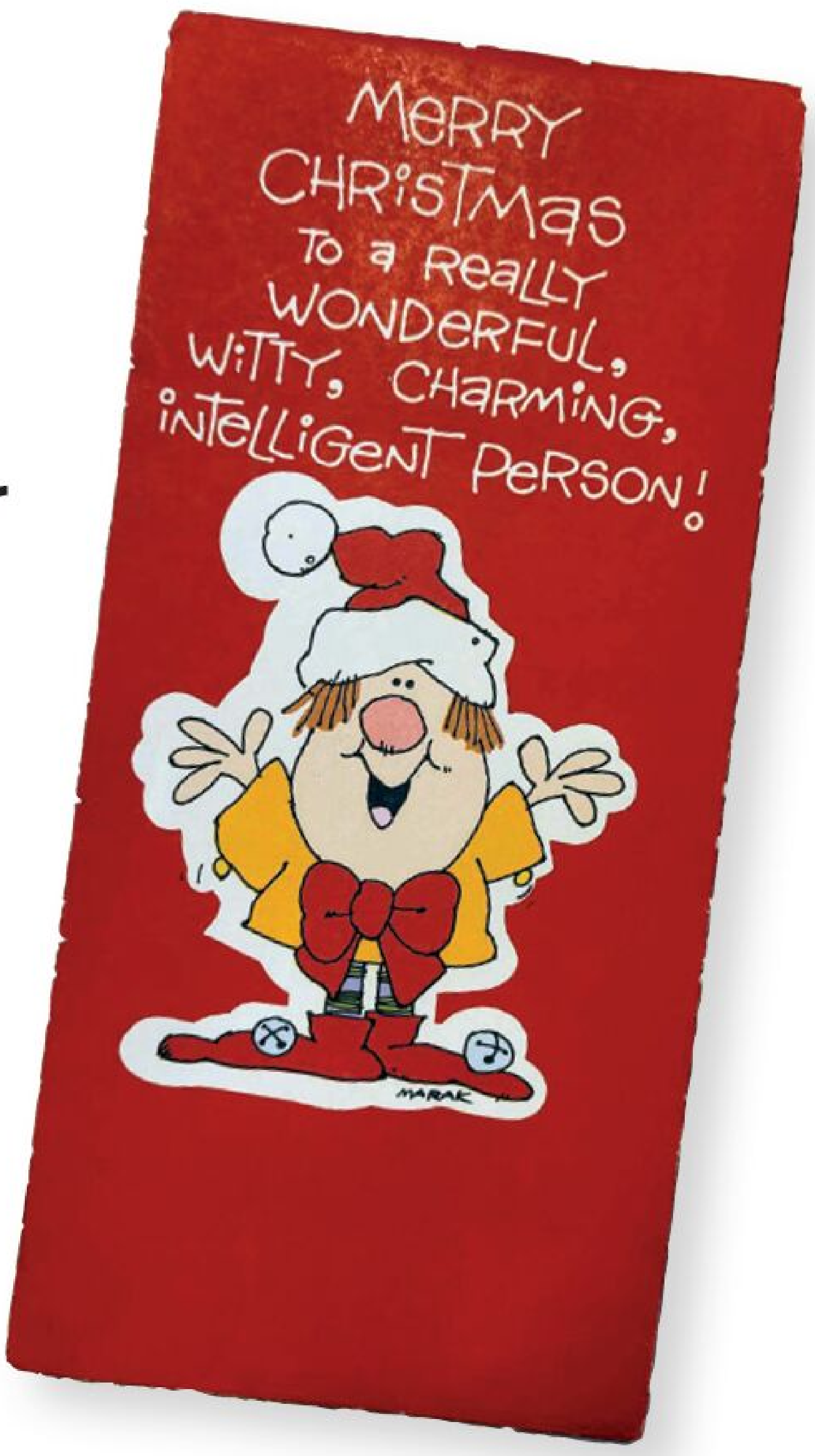
Hagar feels great relief. When she opens her eyes, she finds a well and fills the skin with water. Mother and son drink and travel refreshed until they make a new home. Indeed, Ishmael goes on to have 12 sons, establishing a new nation and fulfilling the angel's promise.

I might have been surprised by the lowly station of the Bible's first eyewitness to an angel. But how fitting that she would be a mother whose love for her child and trust in her God knew no bounds. ■

SISTERHOOD OF THE TRAVELING CHRISTMAS CARD

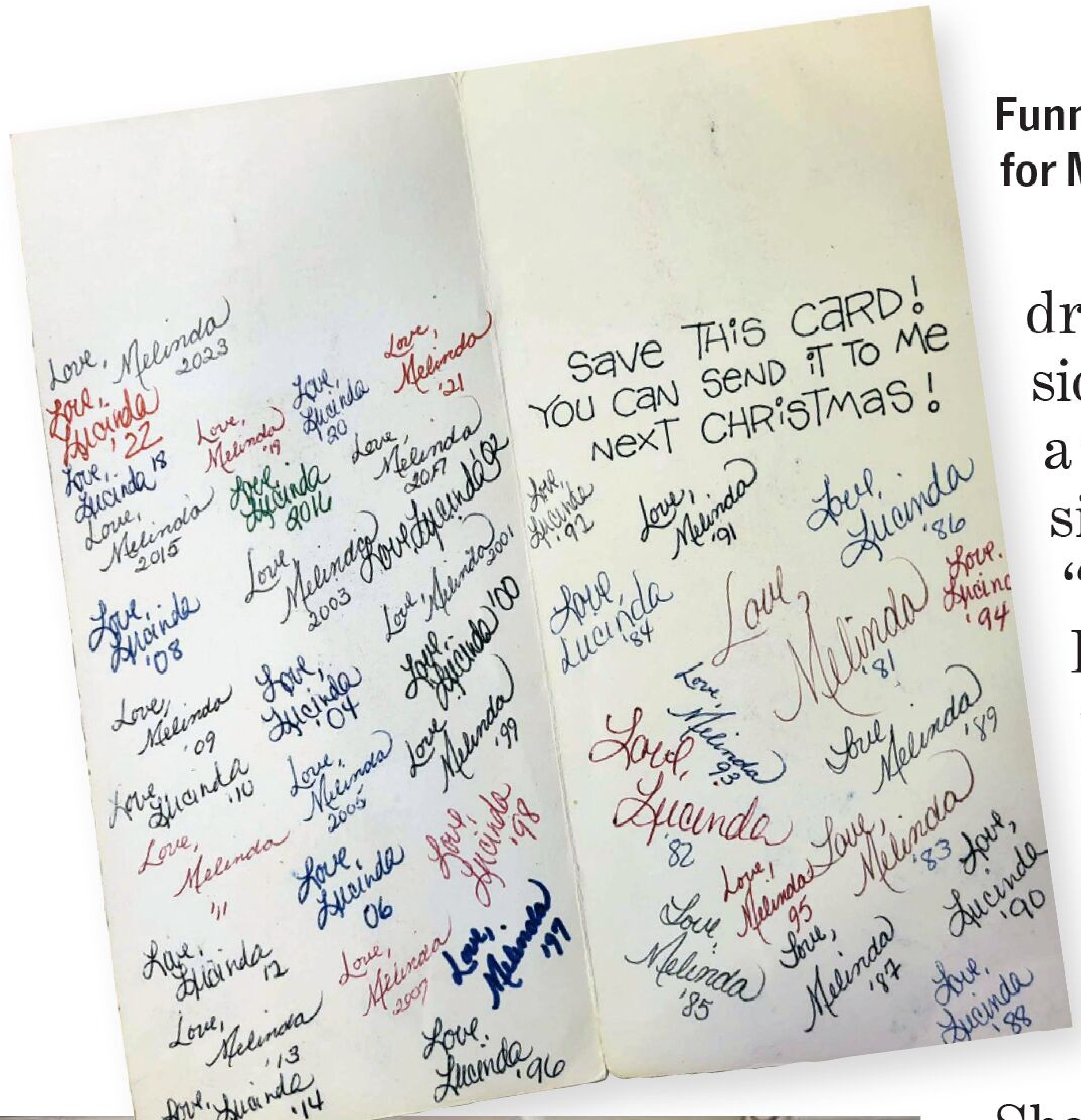
It might be the longest-running holiday gag ever

BY MELINDA HOUSE, PLOVER, WISCONSIN


MERRY CHRISTMAS To a REALLY WONDERFUL, WITTY, CHARMING, INTELLIGENT PERSON!
MARAK

My sister, Lucinda, and I have always been very different people. Lucinda remained in the rural community where we grew up. I moved away. She liked working with children and retired after 44 years of teaching. I liked working with numbers and spent my career in accounting, insurance and information technology. But we both enjoyed a good greeting card.

I was a college freshman in 1981, living away from home, when I found a Christmas card that made me laugh out loud in the



Love, Melinda 2023
Love, Lucinda '22
Love, Melinda '19
Love, Lucinda '20
Love, Melinda '21
Love, Lucinda 18
Love, Melinda 2017
Love, Melinda 2015
Love, Lucinda 2016
Love, Lucinda 02
Love, Melinda 2003
Love, Melinda 2001
Love, Lucinda '08
Love, Lucinda '00
Love, Melinda '09
Love, Lucinda '04
Love Melinda '99
Love Lucinda '10
Love, Melinda 2005
Love, Melinda '11
Love, Lucinda 06
Love, Lucinda '98
Love, Lucinda 12
Love, Melinda 2007
Love, Melinda '97
Love, Melinda '13
Love, Lucinda '96
Love, Lucinda '14

SAVE THIS CARD!
YOU CAN SEND IT TO ME
NEXT CHRISTMAS!

Love, Lucinda '92
Love, Melinda '91
Love, Lucinda '86
Love, Lucinda '84
Love, Melinda '81
Love, Lucinda '94
Love, Melinda '93
Love, Melinda '89
Love, Lucinda '82
Love, Melinda '83
Love, Melinda 95
Love, Lucinda '90
Love, Melinda '85
Love, Melinda '87
Love, Lucinda '88

Funny in the '80s, still funny now: That goes for Melinda (left) and Lucinda too.

drugstore I read it in. On the outside, it said: "Merry Christmas to a wonderful etc. person…" An effusive list of compliments followed "wonderful" and filled the space. Inside: "Save this card to send to me next Christmas." I mailed it off, but Lucinda never mentioned it. I was sorry to have wasted the card on her.

The following Christmas, Lucinda proved me wrong. She surprised me indeed by sending the card back to me, presumably her plan all along! *Okay,* I thought. *This starts now.*

Without ever discussing it, the recipient added the date she signed before reposting the card the following year. On the rare Christmases life got in the way and we forgot the card, we made a point of getting caught up during the following year. It was especially funny when I received the card one Easter.

In 42 years of card recycling, my sister and I have supported each other through good times and bad, always reminding each other to keep a sense of humor. Whatever our differences, it's safe to say that for both of us, our silly Christmas card tradition never gets old. Even if we do. ■

on a wing and a prayer

Driving my sister Joyce's "big boat" of a car—a Ford Crown Victoria with a sticky gas pedal—wasn't easy. Joyce didn't feel comfortable driving it all the way from New Jersey to visit my sister Barbara in Pennsylvania. I took the wheel, but a wintry mix of rain and snow made our journey back difficult.

I was relieved when Joyce directed me to what she thought was the right exit to take to get to her house in Edison, New Jersey. She knew we were close, but she didn't recognize anything once we got off the parkway. We stopped at a McDonald's to get directions.

A friendly counter worker told us exactly where to go: Pass the Wendy's, and Edison would be straight ahead. Twenty minutes later we were back at the same McDonald's, lost as ever, and running out of steam. "God, we need help," said Joyce. "I wish someone would get in the car and drive us where we need to go!" *As if.*

We'd have to go inside and check our directions. At the door, Joyce and I stepped aside to make room for a family of four walking out of the restaurant. "We passed the Wendy's," I mumbled to Joyce. "How come we can't find Edison?"

"Excuse me," the mother in the family said. "Are you trying to get to Edison, New Jersey?"

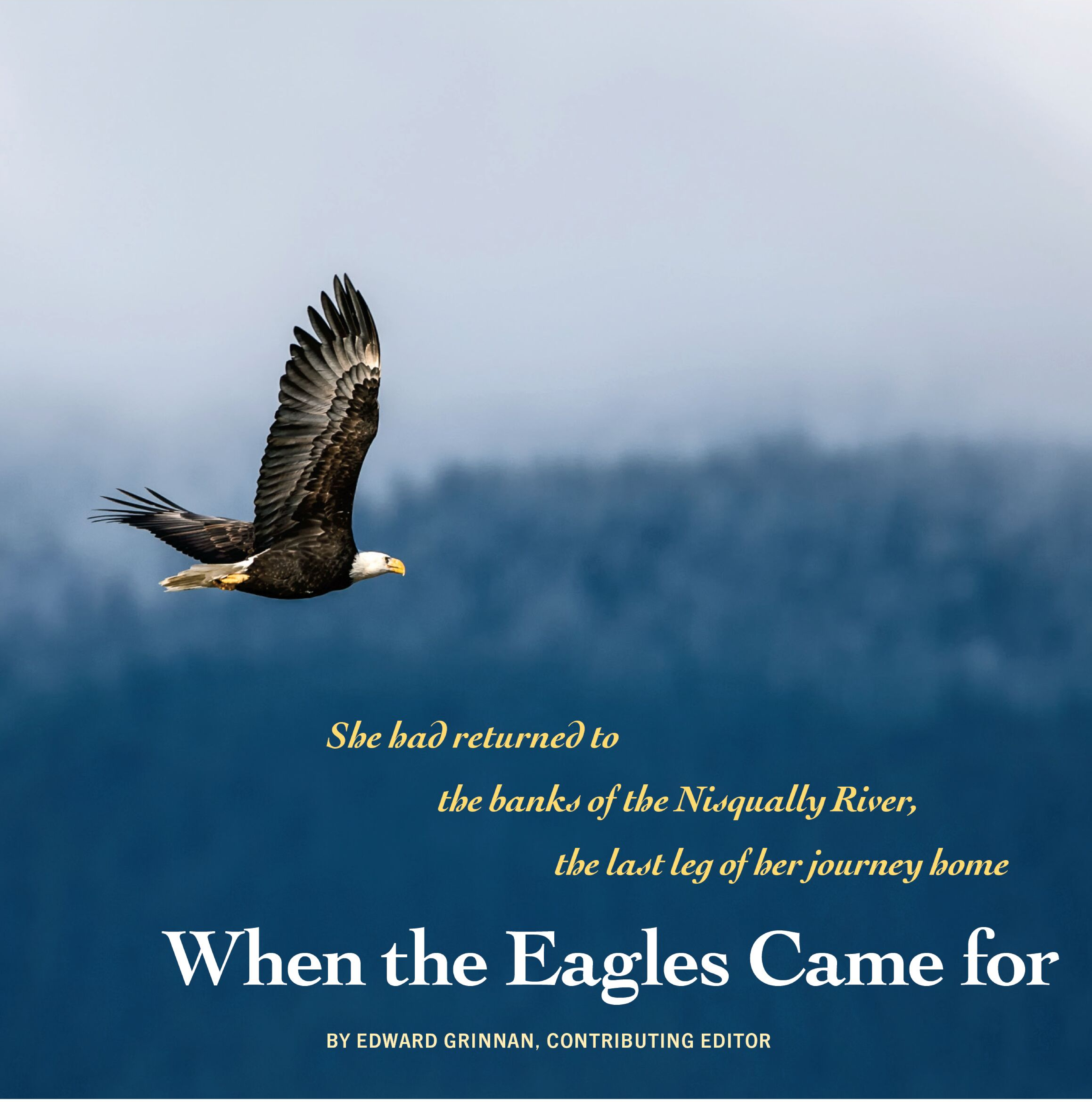
"Yes!" we said.

The woman started to give us directions, then stopped herself. "Know what? Where's your car? I'll drive you there!"

In minutes we were riding in the big boat with the kindly stranger, her husband and kids following behind. She drove us right to a corner store Joyce knew well. Once they were sure we knew how to get home, the family went on their way. Good thing my sister's faith, like her car, was extra big that day.

DONNA EISENBAUGH, SURPRISE, ARIZONA

NEED PRAYER? Join the OurPrayer community! Submit your prayer requests and pray for others at **ourprayer.org**.



She had returned to
the banks of the Nisqually River,
the last leg of her journey home

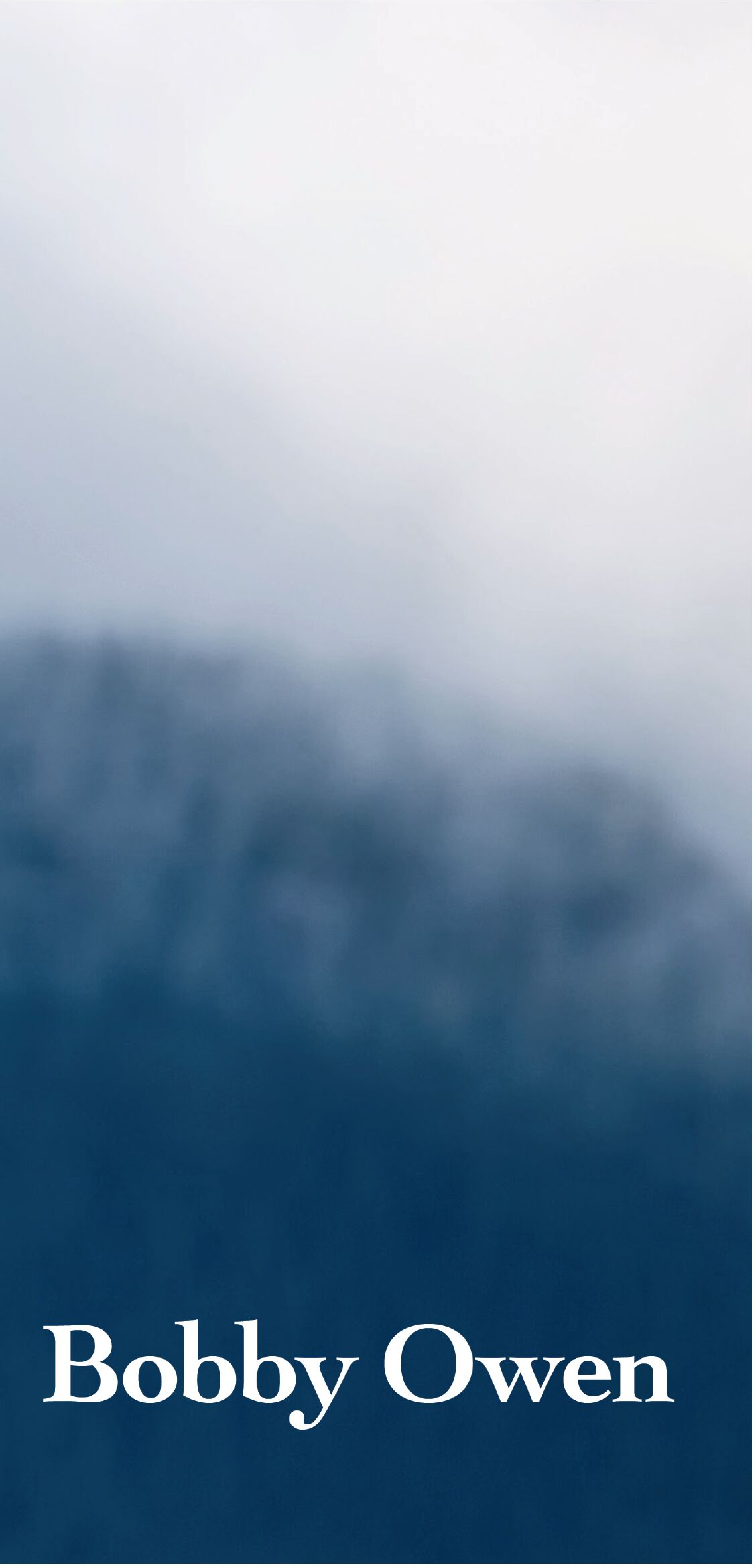
When the Eagles Came for

BY EDWARD GRINNAN, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

It drifted overhead like a winged shadow against the grimy winter sky, circling lazily above St. Peter Hospital in Olympia, Washington, on a warm December day in 1992. Robert Sison, 57, studied the sky from a window on the hospital's third floor cancer center. "One eagle," he said.

Robert turned back to the bed, the figure in it nestled under an old blanket that was quite out of character with the colorless hospital bedclothes

GETTY IMAGES /ISTOCKPHOTO



Bobby Owen

crisply tucked at the corners. Robert's mother, Edith "Bobby" Owen, was dying in that bed, and he, her second son, was standing vigil.

The family had brought Bobby to St. Peter two days earlier from her home on the Nisqually Indian Reservation, where she had been raised and had returned to late in life. Robert's brothers and sisters and their children, as well as tribal elders and a priest from Sacred Heart, Bobby's church, had streamed through the room. But since the first eagle appeared in the sky, Robert had spent nearly every waking hour at his mother's bedside.

He had watched her slip in and out of consciousness. When the rhythm of her breathing faltered, or he heard her moan softly with pain, his fingers tightened around the tall, rough-hewn staff that he held, an eagle talon carved at one end and two feathers hanging from leather strips wrapped around it. His long, straight black hair was held in place by a bright-red bandanna tied around his forehead. As Robert watched the ravaged body in the bed struggle to release its occupant to eternal life, he thought about his mother's life on earth.

Bobby Owen was born in 1916, in a crude cabin on the banks of the Nisqually River where her people had lived for generations. She grew up close to the land. Water came from the fast-moving river—cold in summer, hard with ice in winter. She fashioned dolls from the soft, fragrant cedar bark that had served as clothing for her ancestors. On pretty

When she fished, Bobby practiced the age-old custom of leaving some of her catch behind for the eagles.

spring days, she ran barefoot across the pine needle carpet of the forest, and she could climb trees and skip rocks as well as any boy.

Life was not easy, but nature was generous, providing for the family's needs. There were deer, bears and rabbits to hunt. From the Nisqually came a plenitude of silvery salmon and steelhead. The family gathered mussels, crabs, shrimp and clams from nearby Puget Sound. They grew vegetables on a plot of land behind the cabin. Best of all were the wild blueberries, salmonberries and huckleberries that stained the hands that plucked them.

Above this abundant panorama soared the eagle, a creature honored by Bobby's people. Whenever she fished, Bobby practiced the age-old custom of leaving some of her catch behind for the eagles as a way of acknowledging the gifts of nature. The eagle was nature at its most majestic.

When Bobby was old enough she was sent to the local Catholic school. There the nuns taught her to read and write in the white man's tongue. She also learned about the white man's God and how he had come down from heaven to die on a tree for mankind's salvation. She was greatly drawn to a colorful picture book that showed this God as a little baby nestled in a crude manger, with wonderful winged spirits hovering in the heavens above. They were strong and protective, fierce and brave—like eagles.

"They're angels," one of the nuns explained. "You have one of your own who is with you wherever you go." Bobby imagined this marvelous benefactor flying with her through the woods and watching over her during the night, like an eagle.

At 16 Bobby married and left the reservation for a world where food was bought in stores and people wore shoes when they went outside, even on the prettiest spring day. Her husband's work as a cook took them from town to town, and over the years Bobby bore 12 children.

During World War II she worked as a riveter in a Seattle aircraft plant. In Alaska she toiled in a cannery, boning and skinning the salmon that would be packed into airtight aluminum cans and shipped all over the world. But there were no ancient customs here. No one thought of honoring the eagle with an extra portion of fish. Still, Bobby always remembered to put out a prayer of thanks for her guardian angel, which had followed her even to Alaska, and for the angels she knew watched over her children and grandchildren.

The children grew up and moved far away. They lived in cities with telephones, televisions, cars and freeways, and she followed them. But as she neared the end of her life, Bobby wanted to be back on the reservation, beside the rushing waters of the Nisqually, beneath the wide skies where eagles soared.

Robert had joined the Navy and traveled to places where buildings loomed higher than the tallest pines and firs. But eventually he too returned to the reservation, rediscovering the native ways. When Bobby learned she had cancer, she moved in with him. She was dying and she knew it; so did her children. One day one of her daughters brought her an old and cherished blanket, a "journey blanket," as it was called in the native tongue, to keep her comfortable while she made her final trip to the other side.

Her last trip on earth was to St. Peter. With Robert at her side, Bobby slipped into a coma, still clutching her journey blanket. Just then Robert glanced out the window and saw one lone eagle circling above the fir trees on the hospital grounds. "One eagle," Robert explained to the others in the room, "for her spirit."

Then, incredibly, 12 eagles appeared a short time later, one for each of Bobby's children. "To remind us that we will all be watched over when she is gone," Robert said.

There were more. At one point an observer counted 30—an eagle for each grandchild. Eagles are not rare in the Pacific Northwest, but it is most unusual when they gather in such large numbers, and extraordinary when they do so over populated areas. No one could recall such an event. Not the nurses and doctors who paused from their work to watch the eagles, nor the reporter from the local newspaper who was dispatched to cover the story, nor the townspeople who could see them in Olympia. Even the priest from Sacred Heart and the Nisqually medicine man from Seattle were dazzled.

"They are coming to take her home," Bobby's daughter said.

On the last day of Bobby's life, just one eagle flew above the hospital. "It's her eagle," Robert said quietly. "Her guardian angel." As the great bird circled and swooped, Bobby Owen breathed her last. A moment later the eagle was gone.

"She can rest now," Robert said. "She is home." ■

ILLUSTRATIONS BY DONNA GRETHEN

Valentine Angels

Straight
from heaven—
with love

Everlasting Kiss

Valentine's Day was only a month away when my husband, Brian, went to heaven. Even in our seventies, we celebrated our love every day, not just on February 14. I couldn't imagine a Valentine's Day without him.

On the night of Brian's passing, I lay in bed remembering all that had changed and all that had stayed the same in our 36 years together. Our cozy Friday evening happy hour became hot tea hour in our golden years. The passionate kisses of our youth became loving kisses earned over time. We had never stopped walking hand in hand.

I drifted off to sleep and dreamed. Brian was standing in our living room, but he appeared to be younger and stronger, the picture of health. We sat down next to each other on the couch. He put his arm around me and kissed me. The same handsome, sweet man I'd never fallen out of love with was as real as real could be. I woke up believing I'd just spent a few minutes with him.

I've thought of that dream every day since, but I hold it especially close on Valentine's Day. I have an everlasting kiss from my sweetheart to celebrate on the holiday of love.

BARBARA WALKER, CONROE, TEXAS

"Relationship Goals!"

I'd spent the beautiful summer's day trying—and failing at—Gospel living. I brought chocolates to an older neighbor who regretfully admitted that her doctor had forbidden her to have sugar. I ended a call with a friend fresh from a breakup with her feeling even worse. And I struck out a third time by delivering a package left in the lobby for a woman who'd just moved into our building. When she answered the door, she made it clear she preferred to retrieve her own mail.

My husband, Charlie, listened to my list of missteps and suggested we head to the beach, spread out our blanket and nap. I agreed, deciding I was finished doing God's work for the day. We lay in the sun, Charlie's arm around me, my hand in his, our eyes closed.

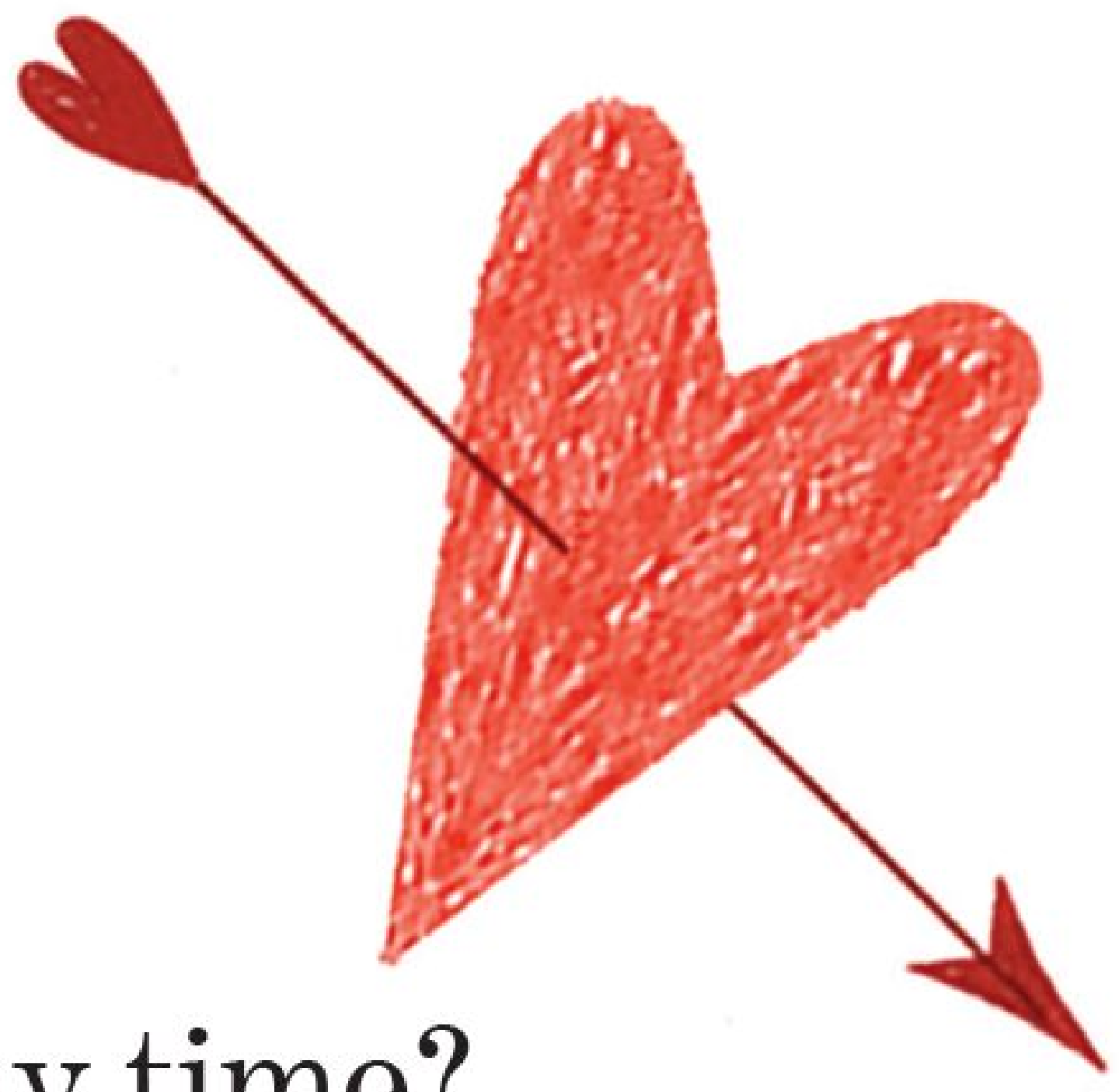
We'd settled near a group of young couples who were packing up, laughing and teasing one another, probably after their full day at the beach. They quieted as they walked off past us, but I heard their whispers. "Hope that's us in 40 years." "I'm going to remember those two." "Relationship goals!"

I squeezed Charlie's hand, feeling good about our example. "You never know when God might decide to use you," he said. It was a good day for Gospel living, after all.

MARCI ALBORGHETTI, NEW LONDON, CONNECTICUT

Two Times a Matchmaker

Barbara and I had been lifelong friends. She was the one who'd introduced me to my husband, Bart. When I lost him to a heart attack, Barbara was by my side to console me. Years went by before she began prodding me to date again. I refused. I couldn't imagine loving anyone else in a romantic way, and



I had no intention of remarrying. So why waste my time?

"I met the nicest man at church last week," Barbara said one day. "His name's Bruce. Come with me Sunday so I can introduce you." Barbara would not take no for an answer. The next Sunday, I agreed to have lunch with him after church.

Barbara was right. Bruce was extremely caring. He was also attractive and had a great sense of humor. We had a lively conversation before getting around to our sadness. Bruce talked about his dear wife, who'd died from an acute illness. He listened while I talked about Bart. We agreed that since neither of us was ready for a romantic relationship, we should continue seeing each other as friends.

When I lost my father later that year, my new friend unexpectedly became my rock. His comforting hugs helped me through my grief. Eventually, one of those hugs led to a kiss, then a proposal and finally a marriage that neither of us saw coming. But Barbara had. Once again.

CAROL JACKSON, WIMBERLEY, TEXAS

Hello? You Rang?

I stood on the front doorstep of my parents' house on Valentine's Day. Their old welcome mat under my feet, their old doorbell to ring. But it would only ring for Mom now that Dad had died. I hoped to cheer up Mom somehow and rang the bell.

My father had rigged up a unique system decades ago. A two-tone *ding dong* would sing out upstairs. That was not unusual. But simultaneously, a steady *buzz* would sound loudly in Dad's basement art studio. A buzz he'd be able to hear when he was downstairs engrossed in his painting.

Mom opened the door for me and forced a smile. I'd been praying for weeks for God to send her a sign of Dad's eternal love. But I started to think that maybe God didn't have time for such things. "Oh, ye of little faith," my father would have scolded me.

"I'm glad you came," Mom said. We sat, telling stories about Dad and his doorbell system that still worked. On cue, it seemed,

the doorbell rang. His doorbell. The steady buzz down in his basement. Oddly, though, the upstairs *ding dong* failed to sound. “It worked when you rang a little while ago,” Mom said.

I peeked out the window—no one there. Seconds later, the bell buzzed again. This couldn’t be the sign I’d prayed for, could it? *Oh, ye of little faith,* I heard, as if an angel had whispered Dad’s words in my ear. I took Mom’s hand.

“Dad is sending you love on Valentine’s Day!” She beamed, and I was reminded that God always had time to answer.

WENDY HOBDAY HAUGH, NORTHVILLE, NEW YORK

The Key of Love

Five years after my divorce, I was finally ready to make a new start. I sold the house and sensed that God was telling me to get rid of all my furniture too. “Even this?” I asked, running my hand across the piano that was as shiny as the day my ex-husband had given it to me for our newlyweds’ Valentine’s Day. Parting with it wasn’t easy.

Several years after my move, I was talking to the worship director at church. “It’s funny,” I said, “but I feel like God wants me to have a piano again.”

She gave me a surprised look. “I’ll talk to my husband,” she said. “He’s in the process of listing ours for sale.” Getting myself a piano would really put an exclamation point on my new start.

Remarkably, the couple wanted me to have their piano free of charge. The husband would even deliver it if I didn’t mind waiting a couple weeks. “I can do it the first Saturday in February,” he said. *God is good!* I thought.

I waited all day. “I’m so sorry,” the husband said when I finally called. “I completely forgot. How’s next Saturday?”

The husband showed up, as promised, and carefully placed the piano just where I’d envisioned. And the one-week delay? I figured God wanted to put his own exclamation point on the gift by delivering it closer to Valentine’s Day.

JUDY JANKOWSKI, GREENACRES, FLORIDA

words to love by

“We are nearest the angels when we love.”
JOAN WALSH ANGLUND

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”
MATTHEW 22:36–40

“I think the more you engage, the more you learn about different ways that people believe and worship, the more you can sit next to anyone and be a neighbor.”
JENNIFER GARNER

“It is always a feast where love is, and where love is, God is.”
DOROTHY DAY

“For compassion a human heart suffices, but for full and adequate sympathy, with joy, an angel’s only.” **SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE**

“You can give without love, but you cannot love without giving.”
AMY CARMICHAEL

“A flower cannot blossom without sunshine, and man cannot live without love.” **MAX MÜLLER**

“Angels from friendship gather half their joy.” **EDWARD YOUNG**

“We cannot live only for ourselves. A thousand fibers connect us with our fellow men; and along those fibers, as sympathetic threads, our actions run as causes, and they come back to us as effects.”
HERMAN MELVILLE

“If you pray truly, you will feel within yourself a great assurance; and the angels will be your companions.” **EVAGRIUS OF PONTUS**

“It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.”
ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXUPÉRY

Warm Memories

One family's baking tradition

BY MARY GATTO, WESTERVILLE, OHIO

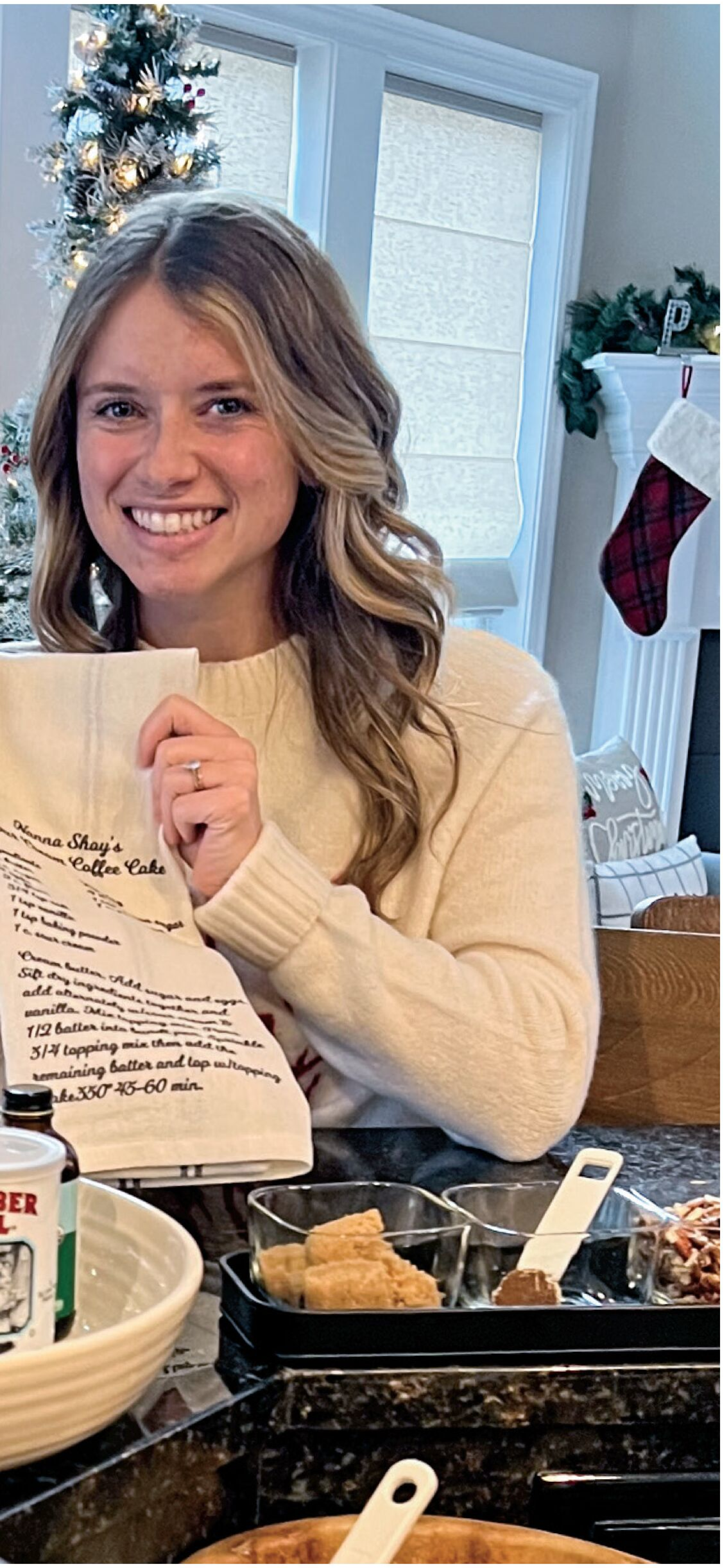
COURTESY MICHAEL GATTO

In my kitchen at Christmastime, a dish towel hangs from my oven door with a coffee cake recipe printed on it. But it's not just any coffee cake; it's the recipe my mother-in-law, Shay, used for our Christmas morning breakfasts.

I knew it would be bittersweet to bake it for the first time after Shay died. On Christmas Eve, as was her tradition, my daughter, Allie, and I gathered the ingredients, including the sour cream that made the cake so moist. Allie had been her nanna Shay's sous chef from the time she could stir with a wooden spoon. She'd sit on the counter while her grandma guided her hand.

Now, Allie leaned her elbow on the counter and put her hand under her chin while our cake was baking. I remembered her grandmother leaning on the counter like that, sipping her coffee, chuckling about one of my father-in-law's antics.

When the oven timer dinged, we



Mary and her daughter, Allie, know the kitchen towel recipe by heart.

had two prayers. That our coffee cake would come out of the pan in one piece. And that our Christmases past would always be part of our Christmases present. ■

Nanna Shay's Sour Cream Coffee Cake

CAKE

- 1 cup butter
- 2 cups sugar
- 2 eggs
- 2 cups flour
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1 teaspoon vanilla

TOPPING

- 4 tablespoons brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 cup crushed pecans

RECIPE

With a mixer, cream butter. Add sugar and eggs to butter. Sift dry ingredients together in a separate bowl. Then add alternately to the mixer bowl the dry ingredients, sour cream and vanilla.

Mix topping ingredients together in a separate bowl.

Pour half the batter into a standard-size Bundt pan. Sprinkle ¾ of the topping mix, then add the remaining batter and sprinkle with remaining topping. Bake at 350 degrees for 45-60 minutes, using a cake tester to check when ready. **Serves** 12-16.

Rocking Chair Angel

I heard the doctor whispering to my parents. He dismissed everything I said about my nighttime visitor as a dream. Still, I knew she was real

BY LUANNA CHENEY, NORTHFIELD, MINNESOTA

Even at 12 years old, I was afraid of the dark. I always slept with my bedroom door open so I could see the faint hallway light all night long. But there was no familiar comfort like that where I lay now. I was in a hospital bed, tethered by tubes and monitors, head wrapped in bandages, too weak to speak. It was the middle of the night, and I was scared and alone.

When I'd opened my eyes earlier that day, I'd had no idea where I was. The last thing I remembered was riding my bike home from school. Pedaling fast, I turned into the intersection everyone called blind man's corner because of the curve that hid oncoming vehicles from sight. The next thing I knew, I was waking in this bed with my parents beside me. My mother stroked my cheek. "We're right here with you," my father said. "You'll be in the hospital for a while, but you're going to be okay."

Slowly and gently, they explained what had happened. I'd been hit by a car at the intersection. My skull was fractured, and for the last several days I'd been in a medically induced

ILLUSTRATION BY SONIA PULIDO

coma to relieve the swelling in my brain. "You must remain still," my father said. "Don't try to talk." I couldn't have moved my lips if I'd wanted to.

"We'll be here for the day," my mother assured me, "and every day from the moment you wake up." They weren't allowed to stay with me overnight. I'd cried when they had to leave. Now, there was not even a faint morning light coming in the window.

How long until my parents returned? I wished I'd been able to sleep through the hours without them. Instead, bits and pieces of the accident drifted through my mind. In the dark silence, I remembered a man shout, "I can't find a pulse!"

"It's George's daughter," another voice said. "Call George!" My father was the ambulance driver in our small town. My older brother often went with him on emergency calls.

I'd tried to cry out at the scene, but I couldn't. No one could hear my thoughts as I slipped in and out of consciousness. I felt myself being lifted. I heard my father saying, "Hurry up!" My brother replying, "I'm driving as fast as I can."

The voices in my memory faded away, and I felt more alone than ever. I knew there were doctors and nurses not far from my doorway. A busy hospital didn't slow down at night. But that was no comfort to me. I felt like a child half my age, imagining monsters lurking in the room unseen. I couldn't even turn myself over and bury my face in the pillow. *Help!* I thought. *Somebody help me!*

Luanna knows what she saw.

Of course, no one could hear my thoughts, just like at the accident scene. No one could hear me there either. I closed my eyes. *God, how will I make it till morning?*

When I opened my eyes, everything had changed. The medical equipment had disappeared. The tubes and monitors had released me. Instead, I felt warm arms wrapped around me. Strong, gentle arms that hugged me close. A woman in a wooden rocking chair held me in her lap. "Father, this child needs you!" she prayed in a voice full of trust. "Be merciful to her."

I looked up into the woman's face. It was as if she had an inner light, and I could see her clearly. Her dark hair and eyes. Her skin the color of cocoa. Her long eyelashes shining with tears. I'd never felt so loved and cherished as in that moment, being rocked gently, back and forth, back and forth, until I drifted off to sleep.

My parents arrived as promised first thing in the morning. I was happy to see them, but I wouldn't be afraid when they had to leave me overnight. I knew the woman would come again—and she did. Often, she sang hymns to me, some I knew and some I didn't. I slept soundly, knowing she was watching over me. Soon I felt strong enough to request a daytime visit with her.

"Can I meet the lady who sits with me at night?" I asked the doctor. He looked confused. "She has a wooden rocking chair that's big enough for both of us."

My parents looked at the doctor, waiting to hear his answer.

"As far as I know, we don't have any rocking chairs here at the hospital," he said. I could tell he didn't believe me but was trying to be kind. Then I heard him whisper to my parents, dismissing it all as a dream.

Undeterred, as soon as I was well enough to walk, I dragged my mother and father all over the hospital in search of my nighttime visitor.

In the end, my parents accepted the doctor's explanation of what I had experienced, but I knew that my rocking chair angel was real. I believe she watches over me to this day. At the age of 12, I learned that there was indeed someone who could hear my thoughts, just as he hears my prayers in the dark. God was always listening, ready to bring comfort with his healing light. ■

Afterglow

Luanna was far from the first child to see an angel. In fact, many people believe children are more likely to see these heavenly beings than adults are. Joan of Arc was only 13 when the archangel Michael appeared to her. On Michael's orders, Joan led the French army into battle against the invading British. Word spread that God himself had sent this young girl to protect them. When the French soldiers saw Joan waving her banner, they knew heaven was on their side.

In 1916, an angel appeared to three shepherd children outside the village of Fátima, Portugal. The first time they saw him, the children described the angel as looking like a boy of about 15, who shone like crystal in the sunlight. The angel appeared several times, followed by an appearance of the Virgin Mary. Today, two million people visit the shrine that was built to honor Mary, the Lady of Fátima, and the angel who became visible there.

OPERATION *Golf Cart*

How were a bunch of retirees going to help a dog who didn't trust us?

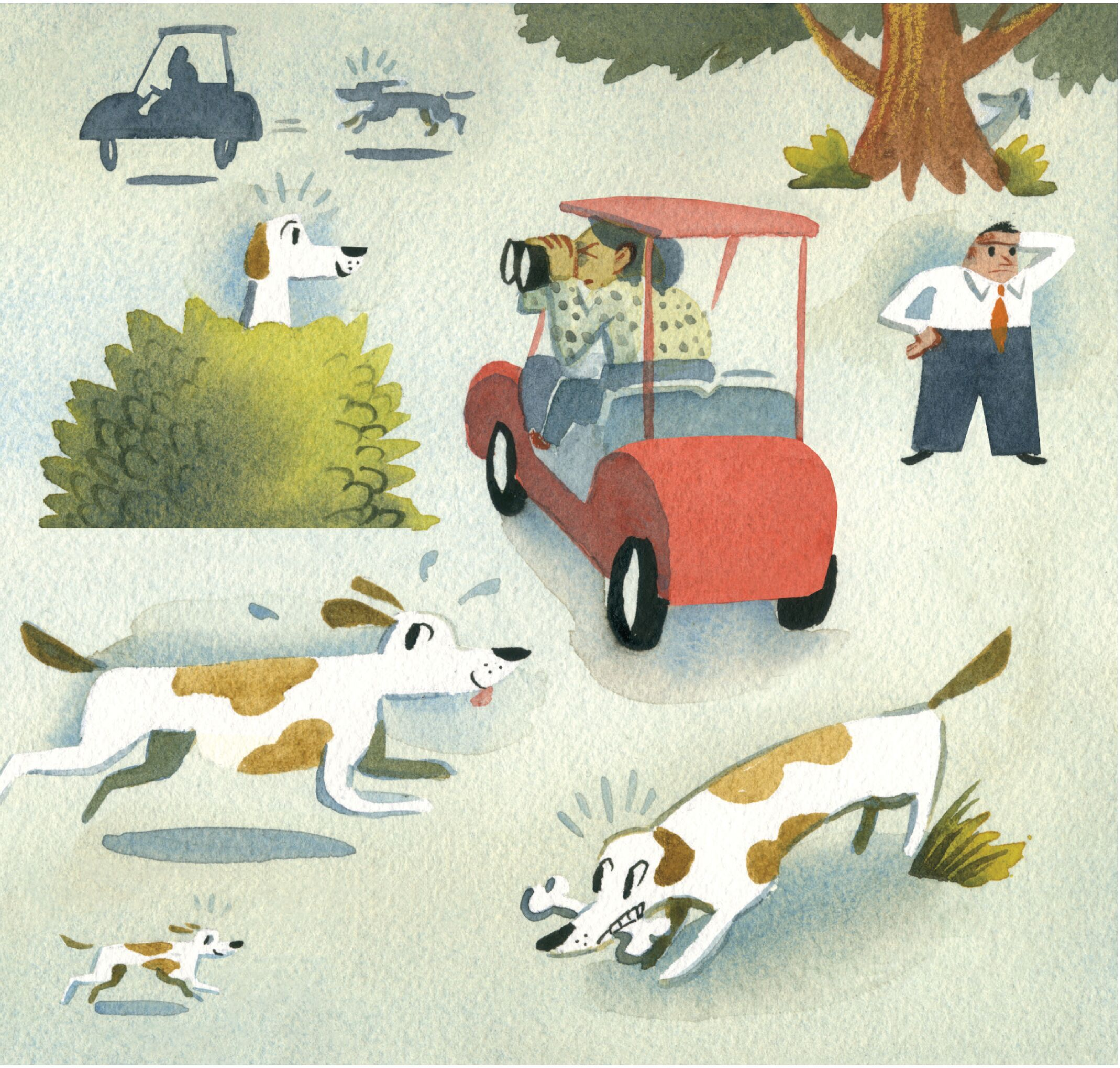
BY DE DORMAN, MISSION, TEXAS

ILLUSTRATION BY MARCELLUS HALL

Life in our quiet retirement village had its advantages. Friendly neighbors, a peaceful setting, the relaxed pace, and it was easy to maneuver. The house my husband, Ralph, and I lived in came with a golf cart for the nearby course—or just for getting around the neighborhood like most people in the community did. As nice as our setup was, I sometimes found myself missing the chapter of my life when there were never enough hours in the day to accomplish what I wanted. Those days were hectic but also full of purpose. Sometimes I felt useless.

I put a leash on my cockapoo, Bella, for her evening walk and glanced out the window at the Christmas lights twinkling in the late December chill. And there was that stray dog again, skinny and scared, running along the street, searching for something he just couldn't find.

Love, I thought as I led Bella outside. *Something we should all have, especially this time of year.*



Outside, I hid behind a bush and let Bella's leash reach its limit so she could walk up to the stray on her own. The little guy was friendly with the neighborhood dogs, but people terrified him. I had watched from the window while he ate the food and water I left out, hoping he'd learn to trust me. I wanted to get him to a vet, the first step in finding him a good home. But if that dog so much as saw me, he ran.

I waited until the dogs seemed to be distracted with one another, then moved closer. The stray looked up and bolted. Another useless attempt. When night fell, I couldn't stop imagining him shivering on the street. *Is he somewhere safe?* I asked God as I lay in my warm bed. *Did he find shel-*

De's friendly cockapoo, Bella, did her best to help win the stray dog's trust.

ter? If he did, it was no thanks to me.

"Why don't you put up a post about the dog on the community site?" Ralph suggested the next morning.

"That's just what I'll do." I went to my computer.

I was surprised to see I wasn't the only person who had taken an interest in the little dog. Or set out food for him, hoping to catch him. Many of us had been doing what we could to help, but on our own, none of us had been successful. We went back and forth on the thread, telling our individual stories. "But if we worked together," one of my neighbors posted, "I'm sure we could save him. Let's do this!"

Within an hour of that neighbor's call to action, our quiet streets were filled with golf carts on a mission. We organized and split up to cover more ground in less time. Ralph and I tooled around all afternoon, keeping our eyes peeled.

Not a fan of the golf carts, the little stray gave us quite a run for our money. He always seemed to be one step ahead, as if he knew the lay of the land better than we did! Even after a full day of missteps and bungled rescues, none of us were ready to quit. I certainly wasn't. Not when God had a job for me.

Our golf cart crew reconvened the next morning. "What better way to spend Christmas Eve?" I said to the gang. Ralph steered the cart while I scanned gardens and bushes, admiring the decorated trees in the front windows of warm homes. "That stray can't spend tonight alone in the cold and feeling unloved. Not on this night of all nights!"

Suddenly, we got word from down the street. "We've got him now! He's safe and sound!"

He'd finally run into a small yard, and the homeowner was able to close the gate behind him. Our neighbor Tina slowly won him over and volunteered to foster our Christmas stray until he found a forever home. Instead, she fell in love with the dog she named Buddy Holly and kept him.

God had shown me an extra bit of love when he gave me a purpose that was part of a group effort. It opened up so many possibilities, and I wondered what he would call on us to do next. And if we would need our golf carts to get the job done. ■

he makes winds his messengers

PSALM 104:4

That Saturday morning, I folded three $20 bills together for the farrier and slid them into my back jeans pocket with my phone. I headed out to the barn, where my horse Whiskey would get her hooves cared for later in the day.

First I saddled her up for a good ride. We trotted over to the two-mile trail just outside my ranch. We hit a gallop, and I pulled out my phone to video the rush. Nothing like it.

Back at the barn, I unsaddled and reached into my pocket. The cash was gone. *Darn! Must've fallen out when I pulled out my phone.* I went back and walked the trail this time. *Lord, I know it ain't a fortune, but please help me find it. Amen.* At the end of the two miles, the answer was nope.

That night, a storm rolled in and wreaked havoc on Skiatook. Wild winds whipped for hours. Rain soaked the ground. For sure, my money had blown over to the next county. I looked out the window. *Maybe someone needs the cash more than I do.*

But I'm a stubborn fella. The next morning, I saddled up Whiskey and hit the trail again. I looked on the ground, on the side of the road, even up in the trees.

"Not meant to be," I said. I leaned in to pat Whiskey on the neck. She lowered her head, and I spotted something in our path. I stepped off and picked up two rain-soaked $20 bills. I've no doubt the third one blew into hands needier than mine.

CALEB GILBERT, SKIATOOK, OKLAHOMA

ILLUSTRATION BY JAMES WESTON LEWIS

When the Time Comes

I didn’t want to give up on my husband

BY BRENDA ROBINSON, CARBON, INDIANA

“You’ll just know.” That was the advice I was given about when to release my husband, Phil, to hospice care. Laying out his daily medications for the next morning, I couldn’t imagine ever making that call. Phil had multiple conditions to manage: diverticulitis, COPD, dementia. He was in a wheelchair, no longer able to stand. Taking care of him wasn’t easy. But I didn’t want to give up on Phil, and I didn’t want Phil to give up on himself. No matter how many times I was told hospice did not mean giving up, that’s what it felt like to me.

I stayed up late that night, pacing back and forth in the kitchen, praying for guidance. *What do you want me to do, Lord?* I asked over and over. *Show me what’s best for Phil.*

The next day was a struggle. Phil didn’t want to swallow his pills. Didn’t want to get dressed. Didn’t want to get in the car for his doctor’s appointment. I didn’t blame him for any of it. Swallowing a pile of pills every day. Endless appointments with the urologist, neurologist and physical therapists. Visiting nurses coming and going. It was confusion on top of confusion for Phil.

Eventually, I made the call on a winter’s day when my strength was at a low point. The only reason I called was because I desperately needed the patient lift that hospice would provide. Even though Phil was painfully thin, he was still bigger than I was. If I strained myself lifting him from his bed to his chair and back, or in and out of the shower, we would both be in trouble. The patient lift would make it so much easier.

Then I made a second call, to Phil’s brother, Albert, in Virginia. “I’ll arrange a visit right away,” he said.

Albert was at the house when Phil’s hospice care worker arrived for her first day. My heart sank a little

ILLUSTRATION BY STEFANO VITALE

when I saw her on the doorstep. The patient lift had yet to be delivered, and this hospice worker was even smaller than I was. *She won't be much help moving Phil,* I thought. It didn't reassure me about my decision to involve hospice.

Three words for Brenda

That afternoon, the worker and I prepared to give Phil a shower. We wheeled him into the bathroom and got him undressed. But when it came time to move him from his wheelchair to the shower seat, it was just as I feared. The hospice worker wasn't strong enough to lift him safely. "Albert!" I called. "Could you give us a hand in here, please?"

Albert appeared at the bathroom door, his body nearly filling the frame. His size was just what we needed, but I knew he'd had back problems in the past. Caregiving could sometimes feel like it was beyond the scope of mere mortals.

"You'll lift Phil up," I explained to Albert, "then swivel him to the side. I'll hold the shower seat steady while we gently lower him onto it."

"Got it," said Albert. He moved in front of Phil's wheelchair. "Ready?"

I nodded.

Albert wrapped his arms around his brother as if in a bear hug. Phil reached up and hooked his arms around Albert's neck.

"Okay, I've got him," said Albert.

With those words, something shifted in the bathroom. Phil was slowly rising from his wheelchair. But Albert wasn't the one lifting his brother. Jesus was. He was holding Phil as if he weighed nothing at all, with Phil's frail arms securely around Jesus' neck.

"I've got him." A repeat of Albert's words, but it was Jesus who spoke this time.

In the next instant, Albert was before me again. I blinked hard and barely managed to help the hospice worker get Phil settled into his shower chair before rushing out of the room. I needed to process what I had just seen and heard. *"I've got him,"* Jesus had said.

Life would be different from then on, I decided, and I explained to Albert why. For however long Phil and I had left together on this earth, we would not fill our days with doctor visits and pills that weren't making him better. The time had come for me to start letting Phil go before the angels escorted him to heaven. Until then, Phil's caregiving was not left only to us mere mortals. He was safe in God's hands. We both were, and finally I knew it. ■

the collector

At eight years old, my son Henry got really excited about cars. He did his research and learned the names of all the different makes and models.

"Corvette C8!" or "Corvette Stingray!" he'd call out as we drove around town. I couldn't tell the difference between a Mustang and a Camaro, so I was impressed.

When Henry found out that most of the Hot Wheels toy cars were exact replicas of the real cars he admired, he was intrigued and got busy collecting his favorites. He looked hard for specialty "super" or "chase" models, which are worth more than the regular ones. Even my husband joined the search for unique cars when we went to garage sales.

Within a year, Henry amassed around 400 new Hot Wheels to add to the old ones he'd kept in a bucket since he was little. Now that he's 13, the walls of his room are covered with more than 600 Hot Wheels, many still in their boxes. That's the mark of a collecting pro.

Henry's room is a mini museum of Hot Wheels.

Henry's Hot Wheels are fun for the whole family as we all learn more about cars and collecting. These days, I know the difference between a Mustang and a Camaro.

It won't be too long before Henry is old enough to buy a real car, a nail-biting milestone for any parent. I ask God every day that Henry's early respect for cars serves him well when he does finally get behind the wheel. Until then, it's toy cars for Henry as far as the eye can see. *Vroom, vroom!*

HEATHER JEPSEN, WARRENSBURG, MISSOURI

Kayaking to Heaven

For the first time, I understood the kind of beauty my daughter saw with her poet's eyes

BY KATHY WARNES, ASHTABULA, OHIO

We held my daughter Jill's memorial service on the banks of the Nolichucky River in eastern Tennessee. After it was over, I stood off by myself, gazing into the rushing waters, heartbroken, devastated. How could she be gone? The light of my life for 43 years now extinguished. I hadn't had a chance to say goodbye to her, to tell her how much I loved her. The news had come as a terrible shock. She'd drowned doing what she loved, kayaking in the cool waters of a river she knew well.

It was hard to tear myself away from the place where she'd last been alive. And no one had been more alive than my daughter, Jill.

She had spent her whole life taking advantage of every kind of adventure the outdoors had to offer, just as happy to sleep under the stars as in a warm bed. She was a strong swimmer, a formidable kayaker. She was serious about her work too, as a traveling nurse, studying to be a physician assistant. For the last two years, Jill had lived in a small sleeper camper near the river, right up the hill from where I stood after her memorial service.

"I feel so close to God here," she had told me over the phone only months ago. "I'm surrounded by beauty, especially when I'm on the river."

Jill liked to describe the scenery in detail when she called me at my home in Michigan. She did the same when

ILLUSTRATION BY WEITONG MAI

she talked to her brother in Georgia. Or when she wrote a poem. Jill's trust in God, her sense that her life had a true purpose in serving others, went so much deeper than mine. "I see the world and I know I am of this life but made for More," she once wrote.

I was a college professor, grounded in facts and rationality. Though Jill loved science and was devoted to her work in healthcare, my daughter was a dreamer, a poet, at heart. A believer in a heaven filled with angels, in things unseen. I wished I could see what she must have seen now. I wanted to know that she was happy, cared for, loved. I wanted to be reassured. I couldn't imagine how that might happen. I couldn't say that I felt the closeness to God that Jill felt when she was on the river. I watched its whitewater rapids play among the boulders, then trained my gaze upstream, looking for…I had no idea what, really.

And then, out of nowhere, there was Jill.

Lifelike, alive even. Dancing over the water in her kayak. My energetic daughter. She was paddling with vigor, skillfully zigzagging her craft to avoid the rocks. Doing what she loved best outside of her work. She glanced up and waved gleefully when she saw me.

More startling than the sight of my daughter was what I saw right beside her. An angel glided along in a canoe, her protective wings spread wide over Jill. For the first time, I understood the kind of otherworldly beauty Jill had always glimpsed with her poet's eyes. What a blessing to see what Jill always knew to be true!

Completely absorbed in the vision, I waved my arms frantically, trying to get Jill to look at me. She had turned her attention back to her sport and was flying freely over the water. She completely ignored me, like she used to do when I interrupted her fun as a girl out of concern for her safety. But the angel's eyes met mine, and she smiled reassuringly. *Everything is going to be all right,* she wanted me to know.

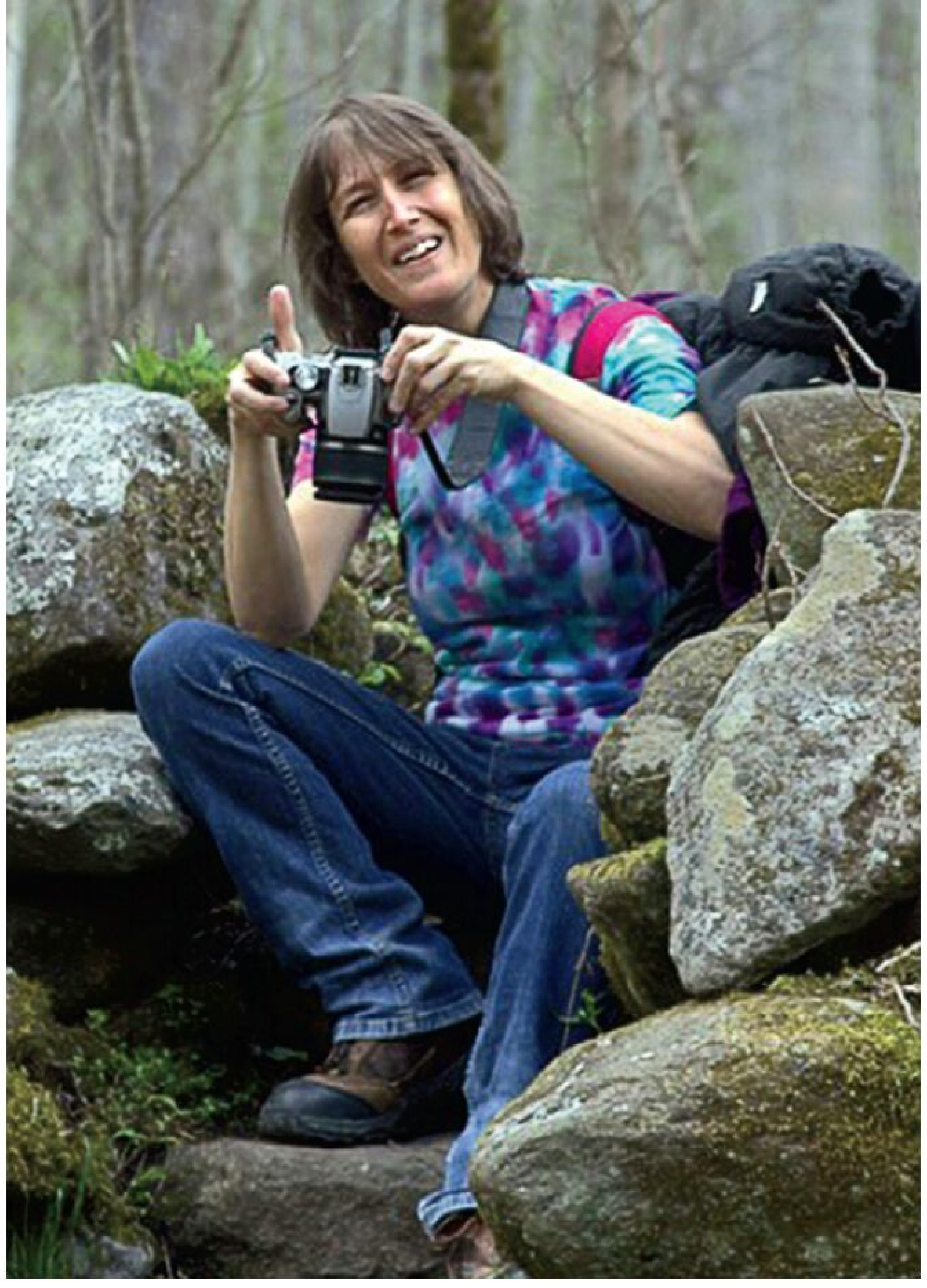
I let my arms fall to my sides. The enchantment I'd first felt upon seeing Jill waned. "How can everything be all right?" I shouted at the angel. "Jill is kayaking to heaven, and I'm standing on the shore!" I watched as the angel disappeared around a bend with my daughter.

I shook off the vision and climbed the hill to Jill's camper for a reality check. I poked my head inside. Here was a good part of Jill's life, something tangible that I could hold onto. No way would I let go of the camper. I would store it in my garage in Michigan, so that I could keep Jill close to me.

Back at home, the days dragged on. I hoped that maybe I'd see the angel again. She had shown herself and disappeared too quickly. It wasn't enough, especially for someone like me. The visit felt unfinished. Months after Jill's death, I refused to believe that everything would be okay, like the angel promised. It wasn't. If that was the angel's message for me, I still didn't accept it.

Whenever I felt desperate to feel Jill's presence, I went out to the garage, where the camper sat unused. I pictured my daughter as alive as she had been with the angel on the river, happy and free under God's clear, open skies. But the longer the camper sat collecting dust, the more my conscience ate at me. Wasn't I being selfish? Jill would not like to see her camper languishing in my garage. It wasn't easy for me, but I finally offered it to her brother.

"I'm sure she'd love for you to get some use out of it," I told him. "Enjoy the camper like she did." A few weeks later, I followed my son outside and watched the camper disappear down the street, off to Georgia and new adventures. My heart ached for Jill anew. And then I remembered that joyful smile and wave she gave me before she disappeared with her angel on the river. I knew that smile, and I trusted it.


Jill, hiking in Tennessee in 2016

I stood in the big empty space in my garage. Feeling the emptiness all around me. But feeling something in the emptiness at the same time. I felt the relief of letting go. Of acceptance. Of trusting, as Jill did, that there was more to this world than meets the eye. Wasn't that what I'd seen? Jill's last, infectious smile, her wave to me—wasn't that enough to tell me that what the angel said was true? I looked to the dust-covered window, where the sun was trying to make its way into the garage. In the dust was a faint shape I recognized: the outline of an angel. I guessed I had to be ready to see her again. Ready to accept that if Jill was all right, so was I.

My son sent me a photo of the camper set up in his yard. He was making plans to take it on the road. I felt a surge of happiness at the thought of Jill's camper on a new journey. I didn't need something tangible to feel close to her. We were connected by love. A force unseen and yet existing everywhere I look. Like angels. ■

only human?

My daughters and I stopped for lunch in Salinas, California, on our way from the Bay Area to my parents' house in San Luis Obispo. It was a familiar drive, but timing was everything this trip. We were meeting my brother to decorate a Christmas tree before our parents returned home from my father's surgery and post-op care in Houston, Texas.

We were nearing the 101 South exit when smoke appeared outside our van's big windshield. I pulled into a gas station and popped the hood. The attendant ran over.

"Might take a couple days to figure out what's wrong," he said. "I'll go make some calls." My heart sank.

"Girls, we need a Christmas angel to help us get to Grammy and Grandpa's." We bowed our heads.

I was about to call my brother when a gold El Camino zoomed up next to our van. A man of great stature bounced out. "Mind if I take a look?" he said. I nodded, knowing we were in good hands.

He leaned in under the hood and tinkered with some wires. "You're good to go," he said. "But I want you to turn off the air conditioner while going up that steep grade."

I thanked him and promised I would. The man smiled, climbed back into his golden chariot and was off. I waved at the gas station attendant as the girls and I got back on the road. We took the 101 South exit and got on the freeway without incident.

We soon approached the steep grade heading into Old San Luis Obispo. "Here's where we turn off the air conditioning!" Our van climbed without overheating.

We arrived safely at our destination, the tree project went as planned, and the girls cuddled with their grandparents while I told them about the kind stranger's help and advice.

"Sounds like he knew exactly where you were going," my dad said. In fact, somehow, he did.

CINDY HOLBROOK, FOSTER CITY, CALIFORNIA

When the 2019 school year came to a close, Mrs. Orr's first-grade class hosted a party to thank us Pet Partners volunteers (both two- and four-legged) for participating in a special program that helps young readers build confidence by reading to dogs.

It should have been a happy occasion for me, but I was there without my beloved Zoey by my side, wagging her tail at the sight of the children. Zoey, a Muppet-like, poodle-beagle mix, had passed away at the age of 11, midway through the spring semester. I'd thought the party might bring me some closure, as the children celebrated Zoey and her fellow furry volunteers. Instead I felt a crushing sense of loss.

You are my Sunshine

More than 350 music artists have recorded versions of "You Are My Sunshine."

The kids handed out gift bags filled with toys and treats for the dogs. Then they presented me with a colorful stack of handmade sympathy cards, each one of which touched my heart. The children formed a circle around us and sang "You Are My Sunshine." When they were finished, Mrs. Orr handed out T-shirts designed with paw prints and sunflowers and a message that read, "Dog, you are my sunshine."

Mrs. Orr, her first-graders and the other volunteers couldn't have known how much the theme would mean to me. In my backyard, under a majestic maple tree, was a memorial stone I had carved for my Zoey. The stone read, "You are my sunshine." Zoey brought a little light into everyone's lives, and she would always be my sunshine, beaming down from above.

CELESTE HUTTES, FORSYTH, ILLINOIS

GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

ILLUSTRATION BY HOLLY MAGUIRE

Our Christmas Baby

Had my parents taken on too much?

BY PATRICK McCARTHY SR.
WASHINGTON, D.C.

Five children, plus one grandmother, all living under one roof in Long Island, New York, and with only one bathroom between us. My parents ran a full house in the winter of 1962, when they gathered us together for a surprising family announcement.

"We're taking in a foster baby," my mother said. "We'll love her until she finds a family of her own." Maybe space was at a premium in our house, my parents explained, but certainly there was no shortage of love. With Christmas coming up, they felt the time was right to lend a helping hand, and that was that.

Nana didn't waste a minute's time. "I'll start praying for our baby now," she said.

We kids were flabbergasted, but we didn't get a say in the matter. Not even me, the oldest at age 13. I'd had the benefit of experience when it came to the arrival of a new baby in the house. Mom didn't ever seem to have a moment to herself as it was. My father worked two jobs, as custodian for our Catholic school district and in the kitchen at a neighborhood night club. If this was going to be one of those instances when the oldest child had to step up for the sake of the family, I wasn't sure how I felt about that. I hoped my parents knew what they were doing.

By the time Christmas Eve rolled around, Baby Theresa was all settled in. I was surprised by how naturally I took to her, a baby I wasn't even related to. I wondered if the holiday spirit had anything to do with it, but no matter, my doubts about being a foster brother quickly disappeared. I entertained Theresa with carols that morning, but in the early afternoon, she grew fussy and hard to please. My big brother skills were put to the test. Mom and Nana hovered over the baby, trying to comfort her.

"She's running a temperature," Mom said. "I'm calling a doctor." In fact, she called every doctor on the list provided by the foster care system. The one doctor who answered didn't think a low-grade temperature warranted his making a house call on Christmas Eve.

"I'd just feel better if you could see her," I heard Mom say. Nana had the baby tucked into the crook of her arm. With her other arm, she reached for her purse and pulled out her rosary. Mom hung up the phone. "He's not coming," she said. Nana handed Mom the baby but kept hold of her rosary.

I studied my mother's worried face. Was she thinking she'd taken on too much? With Dad working holiday hours at the club, all responsibility was on her. Mom laid Theresa close by in her basket and started dinner. My siblings and I put the finishing touches on the Christmas tree. Nana sat with her rosary.

I heard a car pull up outside, but it was too early to be Dad. I checked at the window. A man walked up to our door, his long coat flapping in the wind. He carried a bag—a medical bag! Mom ushered him in.

The doctor spread his big coat on the dining room table and laid Theresa gently in its folds. He tucked his stethoscope inside his shirt to warm it on his chest and then listened to Theresa's heartbeat.

"I've called ahead to your pharmacy," he said after a thorough examination. "You can pick up a fever reducer later this afternoon."

I made sure my coat and hat were at the door for a chilly run to the pharmacy. But knowing everything didn't fall on my parents' shoulders, that the doctor had helped them the way they helped others, gave me a warm feeling inside.

"Thank you for coming after all," my mother said as the doctor readied himself to leave. He nodded and left.

Nana looked up from her rosary. "Perhaps it was the Holy Spirit who changed his mind," she said. Indeed, I felt a loving presence in the air.

As if to prove my point, the pharmacist appeared at the door with Theresa's medicine. "I wanted to drop it off as soon as it was ready," he said. It looked like the Holy Spirit was touching a lot of people this Christmas. Dad was even able to get off work earlier than expected.

By the next morning, Theresa was back to her usual adorable self, being passed around to all my visiting relatives. It wasn't long after New Year's that she was chosen for adoption by a couple who would love her forever. She was too young to ever remember the time she spent with my family, but for me she'd always be the tiny Christmas miracle that showed me that love given only multiplies in return. And it doesn't take up any space at all. ■

Afterglow

Patrick's family hosted five foster infants in all. He remembers each of them to this day. "Besides Theresa, we hosted Lisa, Damian and William—we called him Tony to distinguish him from my father and brother, who were also named William." The McCarthys' final foster child was a little girl named Donna. "She found her forever family right at home with us," Patrick says. "We adopted her!" Patrick and Donna recently returned from a trip to Ireland, where the travelers (shown here) researched their family history together.

letters & messages

Forget about gift cards! Stephanie gave her mom, Judy Spence, the gift of lunch.

STEPHANIE THOMPSON
EDMOND, OKLAHOMA

Shopping for my mom's January birthday had never been easy. She had a stack of unused gift cards to prove it. Last year, I made a certificate for a Lunch of the Month club. Mom, my sister and I were the exclusive members. One or the other of us took Mom out to lunch or brunch, our treat, every month for the whole year. Mom kept the certificate on the fridge and wrote down who took her when, and we have photos to commemorate each lunch date. Mom loved this gift so much, I think my sister and I will extend her free membership another year.

KARA TOLLERUD
PELICAN RAPIDS, MINNESOTA

I'd just finished reading my *Angels on Earth* before braving a winter walk to the post office to pick up the mail for the rural church where I serve as secretary. When I tried to cross the icy main highway, I slipped and slid in my shoes. A driver parked nearby came to my rescue. "Hold on to my arm," she said. "My new snow boots have good traction." Together we made it across, and I got a taste of exactly the kind of angelic help I'd read about in your magazine.

Kara met an earth angel with heavenly traction.

Gabe and 25 volunteers bring *Angels on Earth* to a whole different and deserving audience.

GABE KRAMER, DIRECTOR
TALKING BOOK AND BRAILLE SERVICE
LINCOLN, NEBRASKA

Our library service provides audio recordings of books and magazines to Nebraskans who are blind or visually impaired, physically impaired or reading disabled. Of the publications we record, *Angels on Earth* is our most popular, and we've been at it for more than 15 years. Each issue goes to 110 subscribers as well as to libraries across the country. These days, we send digital cartridges that subscribers listen to using special library-issued players. Subscribers send the cartridges back when they're finished so we can reuse them. None of this would be possible without the 25 dedicated volunteers who record each issue in weekly 90-minute shifts. Most volunteers have been with us for years and see this as their vocation. We're glad to help make *Angels on Earth* stories available to as many people as possible.

KAYLIN KAUPISH
QUEENS, NEW YORK

I was in line to buy a movie ticket one evening and spontaneously decided to pay for the couple behind me. Later I ran into the guy who'd been working the box office that night. He told me the couple behind me decided to pay for the folks behind them, who paid for the folks behind them.... A whole pay-it-forward train was in motion! I couldn't help but laugh—I loved the idea of a movie theater full of people who'd bought one another's tickets. Somewhere, the angels were laughing with me.

You might say Kaylin's gesture went viral.

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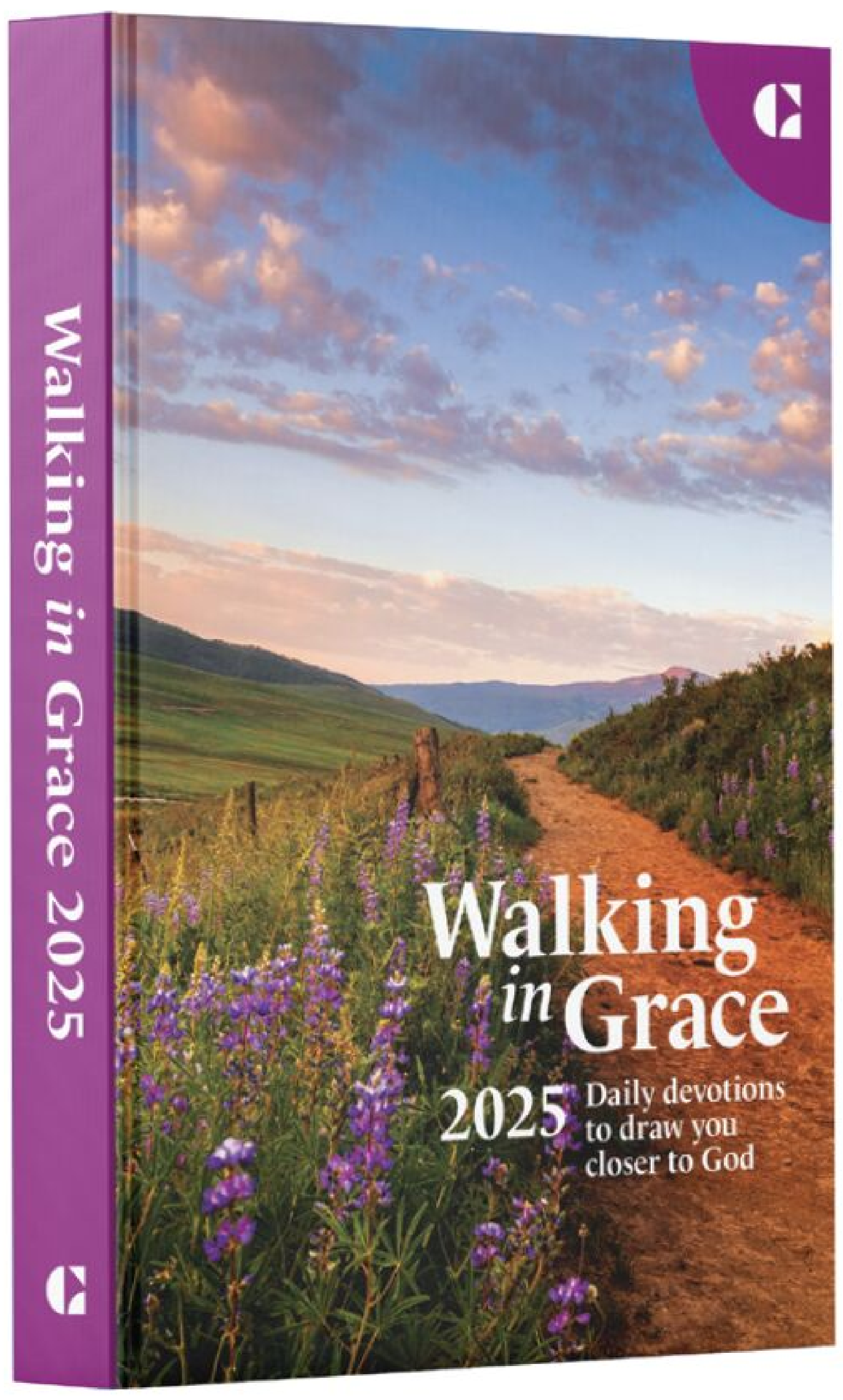
2025 PREVIEW

Walking in Grace

As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good.
—Galatians 6:10 (KJV)



Boarding the plane, I was focused on my phone, trying to fire off as many work emails as I could before getting to my seat. Up ahead, there was a lady on one of those scooters built for people who were unable to walk long distances. Near the entrance to the plane, the flight attendant took the scooter to check it. The lady was okay to walk, but she was limping.

My phone buzzed, and I began typing out a response to yet another business email. I felt a gentle nudge behind me. "Excuse me," an older man said. He walked past me and headed toward the front of the line. He got only as far as the hobbling woman. "Can I help you carry your bag or anything?" he asked.

I felt a twinge of shame. A young man in front of me turned around and looked at me with a sheepish smile. "I should have asked her that," he said.

Before I could respond, the man in front of him said, "I was closer, I should've asked."

Embarrassed, I looked at the man who offered to help after he walked past the three of us. He was smiling, obviously pleased that he was able to help someone in need. My embarrassment turned to admiration for the man who had acted.

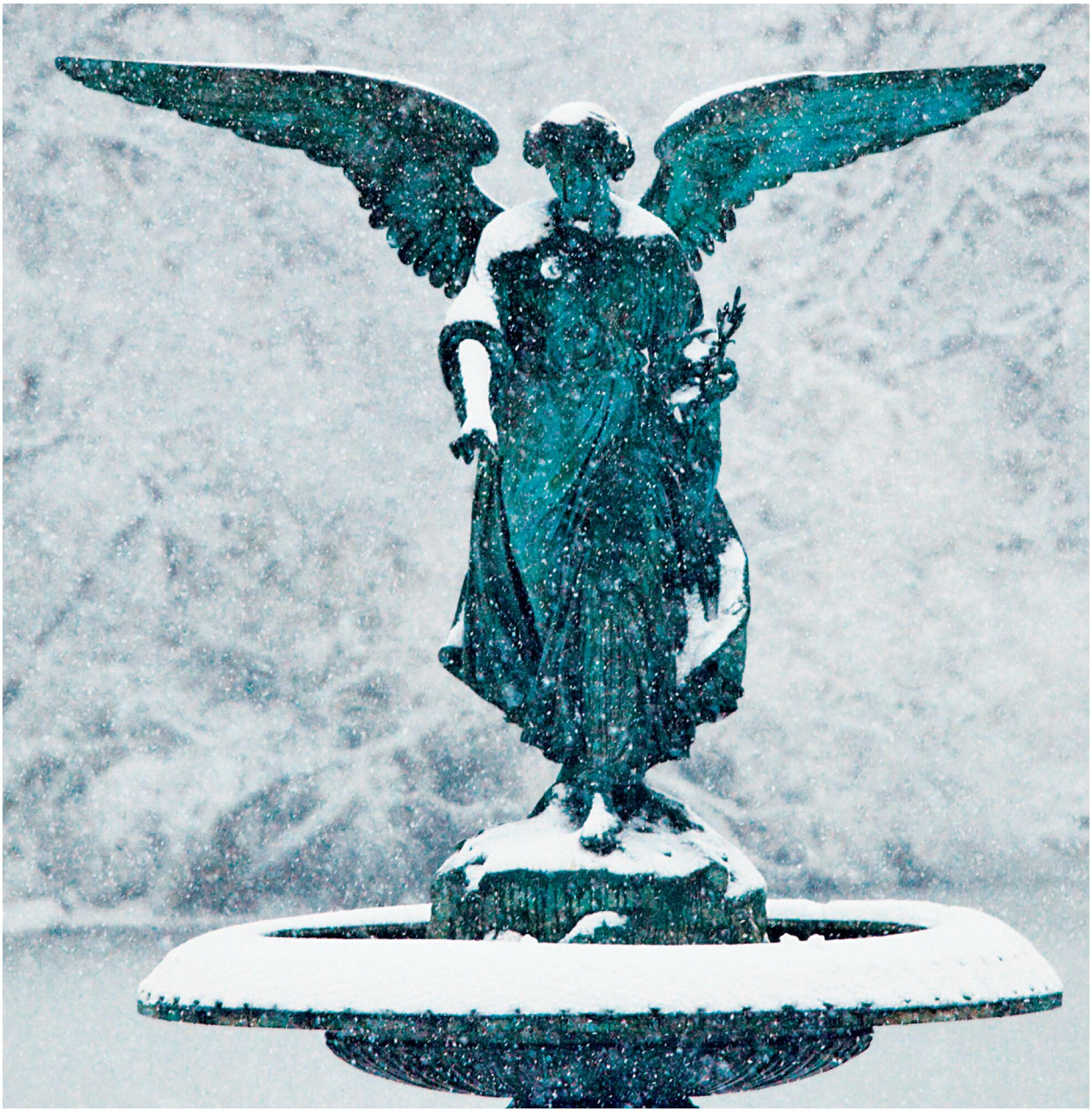
Suddenly, all those messages on my phone didn't seem as important as a lost opportunity to help another. I remembered Jesus' reminder in Matthew that when we reach out a helpful hand, we are reaching out to him. I put my phone in my pocket. I didn't want to miss the next chance he offered me to do something good.

Father, keep me focused on life beyond my phone.

BROCK KIDD

Walking in Grace is our most popular devotional book. To order the 2025 edition, visit **guideposts.org/wig**; write to Guideposts, P.O. Box 5815, Harlan, IA 51593–1315; or call (800) 932-2145. It is available in a hardcover edition for $16.95 or in a softcover large-print edition for $17.95, plus shipping and processing.

angel sightings



AMANDA AHN/ALAMY

The Bethesda Fountain has stood in Central Park since 1842, to commemorate the year fresh water came to New York City. What better symbol of the new water system than the Angel of the Waters from the Gospel of John, sculpted by Emma Stebbins. The Bethesda Fountain angel graced the back cover of *Angels on Earth*'s premiere issue in 1995.

THE EDITORS

Send your angelic photo stories to **submissions@angelsonearth.org**

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